

The Fruit of the Spirit (3): Joy

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[0 : 00] Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and my crown, this is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends.

I plead with Yodia, and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you, loyal yoke fellow, help those women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life. Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again, rejoice. Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, 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.

[1 : 34] 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.

Amen. May God bless his word to our hearts. Did you know that God created you for joy? That he formed us as human beings from the dust of the earth to be creatures of joy? Joy is in fairly short supply in our world, and yet God created us to be creatures of joy.

Of all the fruit of the Spirit, this is the one with which we struggle most. Partly because we do not know what joy really is, and partly because we often go looking for joy in all the wrong places. If we don't go looking to the world around us to define or to describe love or peace, then neither should we go to the world around us to seek a definition for the joy for which God made us.

[2 : 58] Well, a short study from Galatians 5.22 on joy as a fruit of the Spirit cannot possibly do justice to this neglected subject.

However, at least we can make a start, and then perhaps we can begin to fill some of the gaps in later on. Are you joyful?

This issue matters because our joy demonstrates our understanding of Jesus and his gospel and expresses our obedience to him.

And so we read these words. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control.

I want us to consider this evening together four aspects of joy as a fruit of the Spirit. Joy in context, joy in Christ, joy in courage, and joy in center.

[4 : 07] Let me tell you that the flip side of this fruit of the Spirit being the one we struggle with most is that this fruit of the Spirit is the one in which we can make most progress if we take the baby steps Paul describes for us in Galatians.

First of all then, joy in context, joy in context. I sometimes wish that joy was not a fruit of the Spirit. By nature, I do not have a particularly optimistic temperament. For that reason, I would rather God had said seriousness instead of joy.

We can do seriousness, but we cannot do joy. We can joyfully do seriousness, but we seriously can't do joy.

But as the Apostle says, the overflow of the Holy Spirit's life and activity within us as Christians is joy. Now you will notice that joy here in the list of the fruit of the Spirit is sandwiched between love and peace.

[5 : 23] without love and peace there can be no joy. Let me give you a definition that the American writer Jerry Bridges gives for joy.

Christian joy, he writes, is essentially the enjoyment of God, the fruit of communion with Him. Christian joy, he writes, is essentially the enjoyment of God, the fruit of communion with Him. Now perhaps you can begin to understand why I said at the beginning that God created us to be creatures of joy. He made us to know Him, to enjoy Him, to live in harmony with Him. Christian joy is essentially the enjoyment of God, the fruit of communion with Him. God. Perhaps also now you can begin to see the positioning of joy between love and peace in the fruit of the Spirit.

Perhaps also you can begin to understand why some commentators dividing the fruit of the Spirit into three groups of three talk about this first group of three describing our attitude to God, loving God, rejoicing in God, being at peace with God.

[6 : 49] They're all similar ideas. It's only as we are at peace with God and we love God that we can truly rejoice in God. Let me say that again so that we can better understand the air that joy breathes in the Christian.

It is only as we are at peace with God and love God we can truly rejoice in God. Now engines have many moving parts but all must work correctly or the engine will not drive the car forward. So when it comes to joy as the fruit of the Holy Spirit its fellow moving parts are being at peace with God and loving God.

It's only as these three parts work together that as one we grow as Christians. There may be many people in the world around us who are joyful but are not Christians.

The apostle here is teaching us therefore that biblical joy is very different because it only ever drives us forward if it is working together with love and peace.

[8 : 10] But when love and peace are working together Christian growth is not just possible it is inevitable. All things being equal if we want to pursue joy in the Christian life we will find it only by loving God and being at peace with him.

By all means pursue joy but know where to find it love. In loving God in being at peace with God in the enjoyment of God in the fruit of communion with God.

Now there may be some among us who are very young Christians and you have a burning desire to grow in your faith. Listen carefully God made you to enjoy him.

Here's the promise for you you will grow as a Christian in joy as you invest both in loving God and living at peace with God in studying and meditating upon the character of God and his great love for you and in resting in what Jesus has done for you on the cross for salvation as your peace with God.

it's no use if spark plugs don't fire or the fuel pipe the fuel line is broken. All the parts of the engine must work if we are to grow as Christians.

[9 : 47] The promise for you is this the more you invest both in loving God and living at peace with God through the gospel the more joyful he will become.

the more you study and meditate upon the character of God and the more you rest in the finished work of Christ on the cross as the ground of your peace with God the more joyful you will be as a Christian.

Join context. Second this evening we have joined Christ. Join Christ. Should it should go without saying that true Christian joy can only be found in Christ?

Let me say it again so that none of us remain under any illusion that genuine joy can be found anywhere else. True Christian joy can only be found in Christ. Earlier on I said that just as we do not look to the world around us for the definitions of love or of peace neither should we look to the world around us for our definitions and descriptions of Christian joy.

The world around us will tell us that joy depends upon the circumstances of our lives or perhaps even that joy depends upon our attitude to life.

[11 : 15] That if by nature we are optimistic people we are far more likely to be joyful whereas if by nature we are more pessimistic people we are less likely to be joyful.

So put a pessimist into a difficult situation a family bereavement unemployment personal illness and you have that perfect storm of gloom and melancholy.

But brothers and sisters in Christ just as we do not look to the world around us for the definition and description of Christian love and Christian peace neither should we look to the world around us for our definition and description of Christian joy.

It can only be found in Christ. It is not to be found in our variable temperaments or in our changing circumstances only in Christ.

In Galatians 2 and verse 20 we get right to the heart of the message of the gospel and how we may have joy in Christ.

[12 : 25] We read in Galatians chapter 2 verse 20 I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live.

Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body I live by faith in the son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.

Christian joy finds its source right here in the Jesus who loved us and gave himself for us. In the first instance we learn in this verse of Christ's great love for us.

Christ's great love for us. We don't earn the love of Jesus. one thing in childhood which may breed unhappiness is that unsettling feeling that you must earn the love of your parents.

So the more you achieve and the more you do for them the more you think they'll love you. You develop this driven type mentality where no achievement is ever enough.

[13 : 35] Life for that child becomes an unsatisfying search for the love of his parents. He is never able to rest in their love for him. He must keep doing more for them.

The Bible tells us that the reason Jesus gave himself for us is because he loves us. We did not earn that love. We did not deserve that love.

We cannot work for that love. Rather we must accept it as fact. Son of God loves us. being driven to earn the love of God steals our joy because enough is never enough.

We must study the Bible more. We must pray harder. We must evangelize more. We must be more active in the church or God won't love me. Joy comes when we realize that no matter how much we do or don't do, Jesus loves us and nothing is going to change that.

Do you really believe that? I'm not asking whether you believe it because other people have told you it's true or even because in the Bible it's written in black and white although that should be enough.

[14 : 59] I'm asking whether you really believe it in your mind and your heart and emotions. Jesus loves us whether we're doing well or whether we're stumbling around in the darkness.

Joy in Christ isn't a matter of doing more and trying harder. It is in the first instance a matter of believing that Jesus loves you not because of what you can do for him but because of who he is and what he has done for you.

But then in the second instance in Galatians 2.20 we learn of the great sacrifice of Jesus for us. The great sacrifice of Jesus for us.

The question being answered is this, what is the ground of my acceptance before God? Or to put it another way, how can I be right with God?

The natural man is a religious man in that he thinks that by trying harder and doing more he can win acceptance with God. But God will be happy with him only if he tries harder at saying his prayers and he does more in the way of charity.

[16 : 18] He thinks he must make himself right with God by his own moral or religious efforts. He reckons that he can save himself and be accepted by God as long as the good things he does outweighs the bad.

But again, that breeds divisiveness and uncertainty where we are never sure whether we have done enough to be accepted by God.

How can we know with any certainty if we are accepted by God? And how can we have any real joy if we don't know that God accepts us and that we're right with him?

The message of the whole book of Galatians is that our acceptance with God is not on the basis of what we do for him but on the basis of what Jesus has done on the cross by dying to take away our sin and rising on the third day.

Because he loved us, he gave himself for us. His righteousness is ours and our sin is his.

[17 : 31] By faith when God looks upon us now, he sees us in Christ. Seeing not our sin and guilt, not our weakness and gloom, not our failures and stumblings, but the glorious perfection of the Son, Jesus Christ, and he accepts us in him.

Nothing can shake God's acceptance of what Jesus did by giving himself for us on the cross.

Nothing can shake the Father's delight in his Son, and therefore nothing can shake God's acceptance of us and his delight in us.

There is no need for uncertainty or drivenness here in the gospel, for although we know we can never do enough to earn God's acceptance, we also know this, Jesus has done it all in our place. We can experience genuine joy because we can know for sure that God has accepted us in him. And so again we say, true Christian joy can only be found in Christ, in Christ's great love for us and his great sacrifice on our behalf, not in our circumstances or in our temperaments, but in Christ's cross, not in our moral character or our religious performance, but in his.

Now perhaps you've been brought up in the church and you're finding it difficult to accept what I'm saying this evening because you've always thought that the key to God being happy with you is you trying harder and doing more and that the best you can ever expect is that you hope you've done enough to get into heaven.

[19 : 28] My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, the key to God being happy with you doesn't rest in you at all. It rests in Jesus and in his great love and sacrifice.

But if there is an example for you to follow here in this, it's here. notice how in Galatians 2.20 the apostle says, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.

The example to follow is that of faith. The path to joy lies in believing that Jesus loves you, not for who you are, not for what you can do for him.

and that the only ground of your acceptance with God is Jesus' self-sacrifice on the cross.

Believing, leaning upon, trusting, resting on Jesus, herein lies the path to true, genuine joy in the Christian life.

This is the example we need to follow. Turn away from trying harder, doing more, toward believing deeper in Jesus. Thirdly, joy in courage.

[20 : 49] Joy in courage. So our idea today is to take these first baby steps toward true joy as Christians. Don't expect any of us to be the finished articles by the end of our study this evening, but at least we might have taken the first steps in faith in Jesus Christ.

Consistently in the Bible, a person's joy is connected to their courage. The more joyful they are, the more they're able to cope with the challenges of life.

So for example, in Nehemiah 8 verse 10, we read these famous words, the joy of the Lord is your strength. But as the people of Jerusalem rebuilt the walls of the city, they did so strengthened by their faith and love in the salvation of God.

joy seems to be a key to strength, resilience, and durability in the Christian life. No joy, no strength. Much joy, much strength. Now the problem facing the Galatian Christians were that they were being tempted by a group of false Christians to accept that faith in Jesus was not quite enough.

[22 : 05] that God would really only accept them if they had faith in Jesus and tried their hardest to obey the distinctive laws of Judaism concerning how and what to eat, how to wash, and how in particular to observe the Jewish Sabbath.

The ground of their acceptance with God moved subtly from the love of God and his death on their behalf to being a rather strange mixture of their faith in Jesus and their works for Jesus.

And the result of such teaching was the erosion of the joy of these Galatian Christians. So much so that in Galatians chapter 4 and verse 15, the apostle Paul asks them, what has happened to all your joy?

What's happened to all your joy? The answer is, it's been stolen by legalism. The legalism of those who insist that God will only accept them if they try harder and do more.

Their joy was being stolen by those who were preaching another gospel which was no gospel at all, for if my acceptance with God depends even in the slightest on anything I do for him, then it no longer rests entirely upon Jesus and it is uncertain.

[23 : 43] Is there anyone stealing your joy this evening? Who are the voices telling you that you're not doing enough? That you must do more for God? They probably don't come from outside you, they probably come from within you, but the net result of their constant accusations is that you're losing resilience, strength, and durability in the Christian life.

If you begin to entertain the thought that you must do more to earn God's acceptance than what Jesus has already done, then you'll fall prey to every kind of temptation that is.

You'll fall to pieces before the trials of your life, and you'll lack any kind of Christian joy at all.

Strength from Christ and joy in Christ, joy in Christ and strength from Christ, they belong together.

Perhaps today, as I said at the beginning, you're someone who is taking your first baby steps as a Christian. You've only recently started following Jesus for yourself.

and you love the gospel, and that's good. But babies aren't very strong, and they need to grow up in Jesus so they can meet all the challenges which will most definitely come their way.

[25 : 15] To meet all the challenges of your life, to develop the courage you need to cope with them, you need to grow in the joy of your salvation. how can you do that?

By preaching the gospel to yourself every day. God does not love you for what you can do for him, but that Jesus has died to give you what you could not earn.

Preach it to yourself, whether you're old or whether you're young, and the joy stealers will be frustrated, and you shall be strong.

And then lastly this evening, joy in center, joy in center. As we close, I want to remind us of something which is of crucial importance, namely, that ultimately joy in the Christian life is a fruit of the life of the Holy Spirit within us.

It is the normal, if I might use that word, the normal state of the Christian, but it is the Spirit's work. And just like we can no more work love or peace in our hearts than we can harness the tides of the seas, so we cannot work joy.

[26 : 41] Let me remind you of our working definition. Christian joy is essentially the enjoyment of God, the fruit of communion with him. For we have not as yet discussed the joy of God himself, the joy he takes as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in himself.

The Father rejoices in his Son, and the Son rejoices in the Spirit, and the Spirit rejoices in the Father. And I know I'm stretching us here, I don't apologize even slightly for this, because it's ultimately here we find the source of the joy we can experience as the fruit of the Spirit.

The Spirit who lives within us as Christians rejoices in God the Father and the Son, and the joy we experience as believers is the overflow of the Spirit's joy.

therefore it is entirely otherworldly because it is not dependent upon human circumstances. Rather, it is wholly dependent upon inner Trinitarian relationships of Father, Son, and Spirit.

It is a joy the world cannot touch nor steal. It is the joy of the Holy Spirit who lives within us, overflowing into our hearts and minds and affections.

[28 : 16] Just like a burning fire scorches everything it touches and leaves its mark. So the Holy Spirit, filled with joy by virtue of his Holy Communion with Father and Son, fills us with joy and leaves his mark upon us.

So we may ask the question, where is my joy tonight? Yes, we can say it's at the cross, but at an even deeper level.

It is from the Holy Spirit's own infinite, eternal, and unchangeable joy of communion with God the Father and God the Son. Where is your joy this evening, brother and sister in Christ?

it is in God the three in one as together he rejoices in himself. To go back to Jerry Bridges definition, I'm going to change it slightly to help you understand how it fits into the fruit of the Spirit.

Christian joy is the overflow of the Spirit's enjoyment of God. the fruit of the Spirit's communion with the Father and the Son.

[29 : 37] Christian joy is the overflow of the Spirit's enjoyment of God, the fruit of the Spirit's communion with Father and Son. See then how wrong it would be to judge each other's joy by the world's standards.

Or what does this world know about the infinite, eternal, and unchangeable joy which lives within the Trinity? Come to think of it, how much do we know about it?

Tiny, tiny portion. Because even the most joyful Christian among us has infinitely more joy to experience than he already has.

joy. Perhaps today, rather like me, you're a pessimist by nature. Know this for a fact.

Although you may not feel particularly joyful right now, although most often as we judge ourselves it is by the wrong standard, the future for us is joy, joy, and more joy.

[30 : 48] A joy our fears cannot take away, and the world most certainly cannot overcome. God made you for joy.

In Christ and his gospel, through the overflow of the Holy Spirit's joy within you, joy, and joyful you shall be.