

Dear Fellow Redeemed by the blood of God's own Son,

Have you ever noticed that when you begin walking up a hill, whatever you are carrying seems heavier? The more we concentrate on the weight we are carrying, the more difficult the path becomes. But we need to think of it this way: When the load seems heavy, it's a sign that we are climbing. That's "positive joy."

"Negative joy" is easier to come by. For example, if the golfer tops the ball, and it only rolls a few yards in front of him, he may be disgusted with himself; and yet he may say, "Well, at least it was straight; and I'm making progress." When something unpleasant happens, we sometimes say, "Well, it could be worse."

Paul might have expressed such negative joy at this time in his life, but he didn't. The year is 62 A.D., and the apostle is under house arrest in Rome for boldly preaching the resurrection of the Savior of the world. As he awaited a possible death sentence, Paul does not whimper that it could be worse. His is a positive joy!

Paul's rejoicing was not the false and fading joy of the fool. The famous English poet, Lord Byron, lived for pleasure. But on his last birthday he wrote something very sad: "My days are in the yellow leaf, the flowers and fruits of life are gone, the worm, the canker, the grief are mine alone."

If our main reason for rejoicing in life is the enjoyment of earthly pleasure, that joy may suddenly be taken away. But if our real joy is "**in connection**" with our Lord Jesus Christ, it cannot be taken from us! That's what Jesus said to His disciples before He left them: "**I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no one takes from you.**"

(Jn. 16:22)

When Christ finished redeeming us from sin, death, and hell, God the Father raised Him from the dead. This means that, although you may be severely troubled by sickness and approaching death, yet you rejoice **in** the Lord because of the painless perfection which shall be yours in heaven, forever!

When your conscience is troubled because of sin, you may rejoice in the Lord Jesus, Who says: "**Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you.**" (Mt. 9:2) When you are lonely, you may rejoice in the Lord Jesus, who says: "**Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid. Behold I am with you always!**" (Jn. 6:20)

Like Paul, you may find yourselves at odds with the policies and

practices of the sinful world around you. Yet you may rejoice **in connection** with the Lord Jesus, for again He says to you: **"Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."** (Jn 16:33)

As Paul awaited his sentencing in Rome, he understood what the joy of the Christian is all about. Therefore He writes to the Christians in Philippi and to us:

"REJOICE IN THE LORD ALWAYS!"

I.

Notice that according to v. 5, those who **rejoice in the Lord** have a **"gentle spirit."** We ought to apply this to our relations with our brothers and sister in the home first, and then in the church and the world. There were two women in the congregation of Philippi who were having trouble getting along. The problem with Euodia and Syntyche was that they were forgetting the nearness of Jesus to them.

His nearness encourages a gentle spirit, so that we may get along with one another. It's much easier to **"yield"** or make way for the ideas and ways of others, if we live in the constant hope that Christ's return is NEAR, and we are safe with Him at all times.

Likewise, it's much easier to endure and forgive the unkind words, the impatience, and meanness of our fellow sinners, when we remember that our Lord has already come **"near"** to us with His forgiveness 10,000 times more! And why do you have to be up in arms and on the warpath with those who mistreat you, if the Lord of heavenly armies is **"near"** you?

All things may be endured and sacrificed with a gentle and joyful spirit, if you are certain that the victorious Son of God has laid up for you such glorious treasures in heaven that moth cannot destroy, nor thieves steal, nor time tarnish!

So let us live each moment of each day as if our Christ might come at any time! Living in constant expectation of our own resurrection and glorification, our spirits will be filled with a positive JOY that shows itself in a gentle and yielding spirit toward others!

II.

Secondly, Paul says that we can rejoice in the Lord always because His peace stands guard over our anxieties. We should not be as those who give in to fleshly fears and worries – drown ourselves in alcohol or drugs, or shrug our shoulders and say: "Oh well, that's life." Our Lord Himself says that we shall have troubles in this life, but nowhere does he say that

anxiety is to characterize the Christian's life. Paul says rather: **"Be anxious for nothing."** – Trouble – yes; Anxious – no!

The person who is "anxious" has a divided mind. That's what the word means – "not knowing whether to go this way or that in our decision-making." Why was Martha more interested in putting around in the kitchen than coming to hear her Savior's Word? Jesus said that she was "worried and troubled about many things"? Martha had a "divided mind" (same word) .

This divided, hand-wringing anxiety was also part of the problem for these two troubled women in Philippi. The solution is simple. Paul says: **"In everything by means of prayer and supplication, let your requests be made known to God."** In what better place can our decisions and troubles lie than in the hands of our God? "Oh what peace we often forfeit, what needless pain we bear, all because we do not carry everything to God in prayer."

Perhaps we do pray often – at every anxious moment. But do we always pray with confidence? – Not if we are failing to pray always **"with thanksgiving."** If we find ourselves more depressed after praying than when we started, we probably didn't give thanks in our prayer.

Without thanksgiving for what God has already given us, how can we ask for more? Without thanksgiving for what I have already received, my prayer is no more than the complaining of a small child. But when thankful hearts remember the Lord's goodness and mercy, AND THEN PRAY, no anxiety can tighten its grip!

And what is the RESULT of leaving everything in the hands of God by praying with thanksgiving? Paul says: **"And the peace of God, which exceeds all minding, shall guard your hearts and your thoughts IN Christ Jesus."** This sentence tells us something that contradicts our human reason! It plainly says that the peace which comes from God is BETTER than, and EXCELS our own intellect or ability to understand.

Modern psychiatry says a lot about managing the mind in order to escape anxiety and depression. But here we have the promise of God Who created the human mind. God's peace, which comes to the Christian through thankful prayer, is better than all our **"minding"** of things.

If you doubt this, then study Psalm 73 when you get home today. In the beginning of Psalm 73 Asaph whines about how the wicked seem to prosper while the Christian suffers in this world. But then he confesses that his own human reasoning – his constant minding of it all – is unable to

correctly understand what is really going on in God's world. When Asaph finally prays with thanksgiving and makes the peace of God His refuge, his problem is joyfully resolved!

The person who worries uses his own minding ability to try to solve his problems. But no matter how wise we are, or how many kinds of mindings we apply to the situation, we are often incapable of finding a good solution.

If we, as Christians, despair of our own mind-power, and take our cares to God in prayer with thanksgiving, we find that the troubling problems are replaced by peace and rest in our souls.

The problem here is NOT about whether our prayer is granted. It's about the PEACE of God that stands guard OVER our anxieties through thankful prayer, so that those anxieties can not stand over us! This peace preserves our joy in every circumstance, because it comes from God, and does NOT depend upon what we see of our troubles in this world.

This is the peace of those who know from God's Word that He will provide for them.

This is the peace of those who know that the sufferings of this present time do not measure up to the glory that shall be revealed when our Lord comes in the clouds of heaven. (Rom. 8:18)

This is the peace of those who know that all things work together for good to them who love God, who are the called according to His saving purpose! (Rom. 8:28) REJOICE IN THE LORD, ALWAYS, AGAIN I SAY, "REJOICE!" Amen.