

Philippians: Rejoice in the Gospel of Jesus Christ

Session 6: Joy Rooted in a Shared Life, Produced by the Gospel

Author: Dr. Matthew S. Harmon

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Abstract

This session explores Philippians 2:1-4, focusing on how a shared life produced by the Gospel serves as the foundation for true Christian joy. Dr. Matthew Harmon analyzes the grammatical structure of the passage as a first-class conditional statement, emphasizing that the benefits of the gospel are assured realities that necessitate believers' unity. To achieve this unity and complete the Apostle Paul's joy, believers are commanded to reject selfish ambition and empty conceit in favor of counter-cultural humility and self-sacrificial service to others. Ultimately, the text bridges Christian identity with an others-centered lifestyle that anticipates the upcoming example of Jesus Christ.

Outline

I. Introduction and Context (Philippians 1:27–30)

- A. Review of previous session: Living as citizens of God's heavenly kingdom in a manner worthy of the Gospel
- B. Identity and values determined by the Gospel as a heavenly "constitution"
- C. Facing opposition, standing firm in one spirit, and viewing suffering and faith as gifts from God

II. Overview and Structure of Philippians 2:1–4

- A. The Text: Reading of Philippians 2:1–4
- B. Grammatical Structure: One continuous sentence in the original Greek
- C. The "First-Class Conditional Statement" (If-Then structure)
 - 1. Definition: The "if" part is assumed to be true for the sake of the argument
 - 2. Application: Paul is not questioning the reality of the gospel's benefits but affirming them
 - 3. Structure split: Verse 1 contains the "if" clauses (four benefits); Verses 2-4 contain the "then" clauses (the commands and means)
- D. Relationship to Philippians 2:5–11 (The Christ Hymn)

1. Ramping up toward the example of Christ's mindset
2. Tangible actions in verses 1-4 depict the mindset of Christ unpacked in verses 5-11

III. Four Benefits of the Gospel (Philippians 2:1)

- A. Encouragement in Christ: A verbal empowering/emboldening rooted in union with Christ
- B. Comfort from Love: Consolation flowing from God's ultimate love for believers
- C. Participation in the Spirit: Fellowship or partnership (koinonia) experienced in the Holy Spirit, uniting diverse believers across ethnic, age, and socioeconomic divides
- D. Affection and Sympathy: Deep impulses of love for God and others expressed in tangible concern
- E. Trinitarian Structure: The first three elements (Christ, Love/Father, Spirit) form a Trinitarian framework

IV. The Central Command: Complete My Joy (Philippians 2:2a)

- A. The nature of the command: Joy is not absent, but is to be filled to the full
- B. Scriptural connection: Jesus' desire in John's Gospel for His disciples to share in His eternal joy
- C. The duty of pursuing joy: Countering austere or grim caricatures of Christianity; joy is a commanded pursuit

V. Five Means/Ways to Complete Joy (Philippians 2:2b–4)

- A. Having the same love: Actively experiencing and expressing mutual love for God and others
- B. Being in full accord: Sharing a common life together to fuel and intensify joy
- C. Being of one mind ("thinking the one thing"): Maintaining a single-minded focus on the Gospel and its implications rather than non-essentials
- D. Doing nothing from selfish ambition or conceit
 1. Evaluating the natural human bent toward "vainglory" (empty glory)
 2. Humility as a conscious choice of the mind and will to count others as more significant
 3. Humility as a distinctive, counter-cultural virtue (viewed as weakness in Greek and Roman worlds but highly valued in Judeo-Christian tradition)
- E. Looking out for the interests of others
 1. Assuming natural care for oneself but choosing self-denial and looking out for others' interests
 2. Embracing self-sacrificial actions and surrendering rights for the benefit of the body of Christ

VI. Synthesis and Main Takeaways

- A. Core Thesis: Believers must maximize their joy
- B. Two elements of maximizing joy:
 1. Experiencing the four assured benefits of the Gospel
 2. Pursuing unity by serving others in an others-centered lifestyle

VII. Practical Application

- A. Think/Understand: Recognize that Christians are explicitly commanded to pursue and experience joy
- B. Believe: True joy comes from a life of Christ-like, self-sacrificial love for others
- C. Desire/Feel: Pray for God to cultivate genuine love, while recognizing that obedience of the will precedes feeling and aligns feelings after the fact
- D. Do: Identify and execute one tangible act of self-sacrificial love for someone this week