

THREE SURE SIGNS OF JOY

BY DR. JERRY VINES

By the Book™ A Chapter by
Chapter Bible Study Series
from **Jerry Vines Ministries**
2295 Towne Lake Parkway
Suite 116 #249
Woodstock, GA 30189

Let's Begin

The Church at Philippi was the cream of the crop when it comes to the record of the Church in the New Testament. No greater example exists. We've seen how Paul could say "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you" (1:3). That does not mean that the Church was perfect. No Church is. We're not to look upon the Church as a place where perfect saints remain on exhibit but a place where imperfect saints receive an education.

And, one indicator that God's Church is making the grade is the level of joy among the people. Paul's letter to the Philippians, we've noted, is filled with a high level of joy.

The question we will pursue today is, how do we know joy is present? When we examine Philippians chapter two, we easily see there are at least three sure signs joy is present in both the believer's life and in the life of the Church. What are those signs? There are three:

- I. First, joy is surely present when there is harmony within God's people (vv.1-4)**
- II. Secondly, joy is present when humility reigns among God's people (vv.5-11)**
- III. Finally, we can be sure there is joy when holiness of life spills over in the lives of God's people (vv.12-30)**

I. First, joy is surely present when there is harmony within God's people (vv.1-4)

Even with all the greatness of the Philippian fellowship, Paul detected a slight flaw in their unity. This is a common problem in Churches today. Unity of purpose, vision, focus and ministry seem to be lacking far too much. Perhaps that's the very reason too often there seems to be no joy in the church's fellowship. Here the Apostle gives *three habits* believers develop if they would possess harmony.

First, believers must practice the habit of "oneness" if they would experience harmony. An even better term is spiritual togetherness. He says in verse two to be "*likeminded*". That is, live in harmony. Harmony is such a beautiful thing when it's lived out. There is definitely a difference between harmony or unity and uniformity. Choirs sing in parts but in unison nonetheless.

On the other hand, congregations sing uniformly, so to speak. The world wants uniformity. They seek to make all Christians look alike. But God created us originals and even in our diversity, we can experience oneness, unity, harmony. Specifically, we are to experience oneness in affection.

Paul speaks of "having the same love" (v.2). A mutual affection for one another is necessary for oneness. We love the same things. We also are to be one "in accord". Being in "one accord" does not mean we become duplicates of one another. Rather it means our hearts beat as one. We are a grand symphony in spirit. We are a multitude of instruments but we're all tuned to the same fork.

Too many times Church people are simply playing different tunes. Or even worse, someone is completely out of tune. In addition, we're to be of "one mind." Our unity of aim, goal and purpose is clear.

A second habit we develop to produce harmony is lowliness (v.3). On the negative side, we're to avoid at all costs "strife and vainglory". In Philippi, there may have developed an unfortunate party spirit which promoted factions competing with one another in God's Church. Cliques were formed, each jockeying for best position in the Church.

What a pity for them. Even worse, what a pity for us! Believers must be careful to avoid actions which promote division in the Church. On the positive side is the "lowliness of mind" believers were to develop.

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Reflection Connection

Name some great unifying factors in your Church? How can you support your Pastor in promoting more unity?

The person who has this “lowliness of mind” is not the person who refuses to think high of himself or herself. Rather, she is the person who does not think of herself at all. He “esteems others better than himself”.

If harmony is had by God’s people, a third habit must be formed—helpfulness (v.4) The Apostle says “Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others”. This does not mean the helpful person is a horribly nose person, a busybody always concerning himself in the private business of others. It simply means you will not be so self-centered that you think of your needs above and always before the needs of others.

The first sign that joy exists among God’s people, that a spirit of rejoicing reigns within their fellowship is the harmonious relationships that are on display there. It does not mean that perfect harmony exists any more than any other virtue is perfect. We are still fallen, sinful creatures. We have not yet arrived. Nevertheless, while perfect harmony does not exist, true harmony must exist or joy will inevitably remain absent.

II. Secondly, joy is present when humility reigns among God’s people (vv.5-11)

Reflection Connection

Explain how self-centeredness is not the same as taking care of your own needs.

In these verses before us, Paul follows his plea with the Perfect Pattern of powerful humility. No amount of Paul’s persuasive speaking skills in pleading for humility could match the extraordinary Example of raw humility he now offers. Jesus Christ stands as the greatest illustration imaginable, He Himself being humility personified. Christ once said “I am meek and lowly of heart” (Matt. 11:29). In unfolding the pattern of humility the Lord Jesus is, the Apostle gives us *three pictures of Jesus in these verse*.

First, we have the picture of His Position (vv.5-6). Paul begins with eternity past. He piles on one image after another in showing us Who Jesus is. He had the attributes of God (v.6). “Form” does not mean shape which implies God has a physical body. Jesus indicated elsewhere that is not possible (John 4:24).

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The term “morphe” translated “form” means that Jesus possessed the essential qualities that God Himself possessed. God is omniscient and so is Jesus. God is Creator and so is Jesus. God is all-powerful and so is Jesus. He had every attribute God had. In addition, He had the attitude of God. He counted it “not robbery” to be equal to God. Think of it. Jesus did not rob God of His glory by claiming God’s glory of Himself!

Secondly, we get a picture of His Condescension (vv.7-8). Paul guides us down the ladder of Jesus’ humiliation and speaks of Jesus being of “no reputation” and consequently He “humbled Himself” (v.8). Here we get a glimpse of Jesus “emptying” Himself out because the world needed a Savior.



Reflection Connection

Many times Christians have used the image of a “doormat” when speaking about humility. What are some differences between being a “doormat” and being humble? Are there limits in how much we give in to other people’s views? How do we set those limits?

Jesus thought not of Himself but strictly us and us alone. Does this “emptying” mean that Jesus ceased to be God? It most certainly does not. He did not empty Himself of His deity, but rather the outward insignia of His majesty. We do hear Jesus clearly say, however, “He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father” (John 14:9).

Thus, whatever we know about His “emptying” we know He did not cease being God at any time. Jesus was God in flesh and bones! Or, as Paul says, He took “the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man...” (vv.7b-8a).

This is His condescension, His humbling of Himself; and that so much so that He “became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” (v.8)

Humility finds no higher example than Jesus Christ dying a cursed death in our place. Why? Because we need a Savior; because God loves us; and because no other way outside Christ’s humiliation existed for us to be delivered from our sin.

Finally, we are graced with *a glimpse of His Exaltation* (vv.9-11). God exalted His Son, Jesus. Paul puts it like this: “God also hath highly exalted him, and given Him a name which is above every name...” (v.9).

So many people want to self-promote. Jesus said to self-demote. Humble yourself is the order of the day and necessary for true joy to exist.

We are most joyful when self is not on our heart’s throne. God gave Jesus a name “above every name”. How much we must note the name of Jesus is not honored among men today.

When President Bush answered the news media that his favorite philosopher was Jesus, he was ridiculed off the stage. More times than not, when the world speaks the name of Jesus, it is used in a profane, degrading way. God has given Him a name and to those who know Him, no sweeter name exists. God fully intends to exalt Him over all. No one shall ultimately escape. “Every tongue” will confess reminds the Apostle (v.11). The atheist, drunkard, false idolater, etc. will all acknowledge Him Lord.

*Jesus was God
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bones!*

III. Finally, we can be sure there is joy when holiness of life spills over in the lives of God’s people (vv.12-30)

Let’s explore these signs in chapter two. We’ve learned that both harmony within God’s people as well as humility among God’s people are absolutely necessary if joy is to grow and excel in the Church and within the believer’s life.

We now come to no lesser necessity if joy is to be full—*holiness of life*. Though often times misunderstood, obedience stands as one of the keys to a happy, fulfilled Christian walk. We are called to obedience (v.12). He writes: “as ye



Reflection Connection

Read John 4:24. Why do you think God could not have a physical body? What did Jesus mean when He said to worship God in “spirit and in truth”?

have always obeyed...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” As we note this obedience, we must first observe that obedience is based upon a great possession we already have—“your own salvation”. This is where life begins.

Also, this salvation we possess is not passive whatsoever. Rather, we are to “work out”. Contrary to some, this definitively is not teaching a works-oriented salvation. He says “work out” not “work for”. One can’t work out what is not already worked in (cp.1:6).

In addition, this program of obedience is to be actively pursued in “fear and trembling”. God is not interested in your simply being afraid of Him. Instead it is a desire to be what God wants us to be lest we fail to be what God saved us to be. Nor does God leave us to ourselves but involves Himself in our lives making sure we are equipped to go the distance with Him.

Paul says it this way: “For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.” (v.13). In other words, it is God’s great power at work in His people to carry out the program of obedience for His glory. So what does obedience look like in the believer’s life? One thing obeying God does is make us lights shining in a dark world.

Verse fifteen states it clearly: “That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world...” Three characteristics of light come immediately to mind.

First, light shines. It is its nature to do so. Of interest is Paul’s contrast of light. He speaks of being “blameless” and “harmless” while dwelling in a “crooked and perverse nation”. Believers must walk blameless and be harmless. Our moral fiber straightens the crooked stick the world embraces.

Secondly, light shares. If the light is on, the light is sharing—“holding forth the word of life”. Our light shares by overcoming darkness “in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation”. Our light also shares by offering direction. That’s found in the “word of life” we’re called to “hold forth”.

Light not only shines and shares, but our light also sacrifices (vv.17-18). Paul employs the image of a priest who offers a sacrifice: “if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all.” Here an incredible thing takes place. Paul speaks in one breath sacrifice and joy. So often we fail to get this.

Sacrifice is not the opposite of joy. Instead, sacrifice is the occasion for joy! People want joy in life and immediately think they must add to life. It is just the opposite. As we give our life away, joy is the inevitable result!

Paul offers a second pattern to follow but this time it is not the Lord Jesus. Rather it is one of His young disciples—Timothy (v.19-24). Timothy did not

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have the ideal home life growing up. He had a father who was unsaved (Acts 16:1). But his mother was a faithful believer as well as his grandmother, both of whom taught him well the pure faith of the Gospel (2 Tim. 1:5; 3:15).

Timothy was a spiritual son of the Apostle Paul (v.22b) as well as a servant of the Gospel (v.22c). No one cared like Timothy (v.21) nor cooperated in the work like he did. Timothy was clearly on mission—sent—fully ready to help anyone and sacrifice anything. Paul could say of him “But ye know the proof of him.” How many of us stand as our own best proof of obedience to God’s call on our life? Timothy could.

Paul’s well is deep. No lack of believers to serve as examples of the power of Christ at work and empower for service to Him.

Thus, he offers a third example to the Philippians; one they all know very well—Epaphroditus (vv.25-30). Here stands a “brother” in the faith, a “companion” of the Gospel, and a fellow “soldier” in God’s battle. He cares sacrificially and obeys honorably even when “nigh unto death, not regarding his life, to supply your lack of service toward me.” (v.30).

Holiness of life is not only possible but is powerfully being performed in the lives of God’s people. The Philippians must understand this. Do we?

Golden Greek Nugget

The Greek word **Morphe** translated “**form**” in 2:6 carries with it the idea of the essence of a thing. That means when Paul refers to Jesus being “**in the form of God**” he was making the strongest statement language allowed about the identity of Christ—Jesus was the very essence of God in human flesh.

This text became so familiar to early Christians that they actually sang verses 5-11 as a hymn during worship times.

Compare also Colossians 1:15 and Hebrews 1:3.

Wrap Up

*Joy inevitably is being abundantly produced when three signs show up. **Harmony of God’s people comes first. The Church must melt together in spiritual unity before joy takes root. Secondly, God’s people must experience a revival of humility. True humility comes from God alone. It cannot be manufactured or mimicked. And when the Church experiences humility—counting others better than themselves—joy cannot be stopped.***

Finally, holiness of life makes fertile ground for joy to grow in our life’s garden. Contrary to some who believe obedience to be burdensome, obedience to Christ brings a life of joy unspeakable and full of glory.

