

Joy | Galatians 5:22 & John 16:16-24 | 21 January 2018

Our subject this week is *chara* in Greek, one of three words used for our English word “joy”. Larry Richards, former professor at Wheaton College, one of the main authors who cultivated my passion for church renewal, sets the stage for an interesting twist to my/our understanding of the word “joy”. I then quote from Gordon Fee, who once again paints a picture using the breadth of color found throughout the NT. I back up these theologians with exegetical data from the *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (NIDNTT) undergirding the thesis. Questions/thoughts for this week, adapted from Larry Richards:

1. Articulate a time and situation in which you experienced joy.
2. Based on that situation define joy?
3. Imagine you are interviewing Jesus. What situations in His life would He mention as bringing Him joy?
4. How do you think Jesus would define joy?

Joy = *Chara*

Larry Richards & Norm Wakefield, *Fruit of the Spirit* (Zondervan, 1981).

The words “joy” and “rejoicing” appear often in the Bible. They are used over and over again and are one evidence of the Spirit’s transforming work in a believer’s life. Joy is frequently linked in the Bible to our relationships with others. Paul tells of his relationship with the Thessalonian believers and calls them his joy and hope of rejoicing (1 Thes 2:19-20). This is especially true of relationships in which we are seeking to help others grow. Concern for the wellbeing of others and indications of their growth are a rich source of joy. Joy also flows from a loving relationship with our Heavenly Father. Jesus speaks of obedient love in John 15 and explains with these words: “I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be full” (vr 11). 31

Our relationships with our fellow Christians are a significant factor in knowing joy. Can you think of times when your relationship with someone special was damaged through anger or hurt or misunderstanding or neglect? Didn’t you find that something vital was missing . . . that joy was drained away by the damaged relationship?

This suggests that we are wise to prize relationships with our brothers and sisters and to keep relationships strong and healthy. In Scripture, joy is also linked with ministry to others—contributing to another’s life. Paul summarizes this when he reports in 1 Thess 3 that “*Now we really live, since you’re standing firm in the Lord. How can we thank God enough for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you?*” (vr 8). Paul had invested himself in the lives of these people. He had given of himself sacrificially. As he observed them grow into the reality of knowing Christ personally, Paul experienced great joy. 32

Gordon Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence*, (Hendrickson, 1994).

Beginning with this virtue, we tend to read this list as though it were first of all a description of personal piety. Thus we most often use it as a kind of checklist to see “how we are doing.” I would not hereby

argue against this reading; my concern is that in context Paul probably intended these primarily as virtues that should characterize the life of the Christian community, as it lives out its corporate life with one another in the world. 447-448 (footnote #279)

Joy is one of the foremost characteristics of genuinely Christian, and therefore genuinely Spiritual, piety. What is remarkable is its appearance in this list of virtues that are mainly ethical in character. As with love and peace that stand on either side of it, Paul is probably not thinking so much of the personal, individual experience of joy—although as with this whole list that can scarcely be excluded—but of the joy that characterizes life together in Christ. Life in Christ, and therefore life by the Spirit, is a life of joy; such joy is to characterize the Christian community above all else (1 Thes 5:16 (“*rejoice always*”). In this regard the two other texts (Rom 14:17; 15:13) where joy, peace, and the Holy Spirit stand in collocation may be instructive. There joy and peace occur together, first as resolution and secondly as prayer, in a section (14:1-15:13) that is written specifically as an appeal for Jewish and Gentile believers to “accept one another” (15:7), rather than to judge or look down on each other (14:1-4). A righteousness that includes joy and peace in the Holy Spirit will have little room for internecine [mutually destructive] strife (Gal 5:15) or disdain of others (5:26-6:5). 447-448

For Paul, as for the rest of the NT in general, the presence or absence of joy is quite unrelated to one’s circumstances, as Paul’s letter to the Philippians makes plain. It is related in its entirety to what God has done for us in Christ through the Spirit. The Pauline imperative, stemming from joy as the fruit of the Spirit, is not simply, “rejoice”—although it often comes in that basic form as well—but “rejoice in the Lord.” This focus is the key to understanding of joy of the Spirit. A community that if “rejoicing in the Lord always” is not a community easily given to “eating and devouring one another” (v 15), in which people think much too highly of themselves (6:4). 448

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There are three main groups of words in the NT which denote human joy and happiness and express its special character. In the case of *chairō* physical comfort and well-being are the basis of joy. Hence the use of the verb in the good wishes which people express on greeting one another and on parting. They refer to the benefits of health and happiness which, in fact, people wish for themselves. On the other hand, *euphrainō* indicates the subjective feeling of joy, and *agalliaomai* the outward demonstration of joy and pride and the exultation experienced in public worship. 352

The phrases “be filled with intense joy” and “rejoice greatly”, which occur in the NT, doubtless go back to OT influence (Matt 2:10; cf. Jonah 4:6; Jn 3:29; cf. Isa 66:10). *Chara* denotes both the state and the object of the joy. Also to be noted is the etymological connection with *charis* (grace) which has not always been clearly distinguished in meaning from *chara*. 356

Old Testament: In the OT there is no apology for joy in the good things of life, such as wise children (Prov 23:25), eating and drinking (1 Ki 3:1; cf. Ps 104:14 f.). But the author of Proverbs also warns that joy is transitory and is threatened by the vicissitudes of the life: after laughter comes weeping (Prov 14:13). 357

God is the giver of all joy and of all blessings (1 Ki 8:66). He gives his gracious word (1 Ki 8:56) which far outweighs all transitory blessings. This word comforts and strengthens in times of temptation and distress (Jer 15:16). It enables men to endure until such time as God turns mourning into joy (Ps 126:5). 357

New Testament: In the NT the verb and noun occur chiefly in the Gospels and Pauline Epistles (the verb 74 times; the noun 59 times)... It is no accident that the words appear particularly where there is express mention of the eschatological fulfillment in Christ, of being in him, and of hope in him. But it ought not to be overlooked that the whole NT message as the proclamation of God's saving work in Christ is a message of joy (Gospel = Good News). 357

The Pauline Epistles testify to the paradox that Christian joy is to be found only in the midst of sadness, affliction and care. Indeed, this is precisely where it gives proof of its power. This joy has its source beyond mere earthly, human joy. It is joy "*in the Lord*", and therefore outside ourselves. This is why Paul constantly reminds his readers of its existence and exhorts them to manifest it (Phil 3:1; 4:4, 10; Rom 12:12; 2 Cor 6:10). It is the "*joy of faith*" (Phil 1:25; Rom 15:13). It has its basis in the hope and confidence of faith, which despite all fightings and fears (2 Cor 7:5) is certain of justification through Christ (Rom 8:31 f.) and looks forward to his return as the risen Lord. As the joy of faith, it is also a fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22), and is spoken of as joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom 14:17; 1 Thess 1:6). It is thus a spiritual gift, and in this respect approximates to the idea of *charis*, grace. Because faith and its consequent joy do not come from ourselves, Paul can be confident and rejoice even when Christ is preached with base motives. The important thing is that God should do his gracious work and that as many men as possible should share in the gospel (Phil 1:5 f., 15-18). 359-360

Paul wrote the Epistle to the Philippians from prison (possibly in Ephesus) and at the time was still uncertain of the outcome of his trial. There is evidence that he felt lonely (2:20 f.), and that faithful preaching of the gospel was in jeopardy (1:15 ff.; 2:21). Once again there was "*anxiety*" (*thylipsis*) (4:14; cf. Col 1:24). Yet there were also grounds for thankfulness and unmitigated joy: thankfulness for the participation of the Philippians in the gospel (1:5), and joy over the continuing proclamation of Christ (1:18). Constrained by the gospel and by Christ himself, Paul exhorts his readers to rejoice together with him (2:17 f.), to cast care behind them (4:16), and to be of one mind in the fellowship of the Spirit (2:1 f.). What if there is occasion for anxiety; what if Paul is soon to meet his death, so long as Christ is magnified in his body (1:20)! 360

In Philippians joy is thus a continuous "*defiant 'Nevertheless'*" (Karl Barth). This "*nevertheless*" draws its strength not from itself but from untiring prayer which lays every need before God (4:6; cf. 1 Thess 5:16; Col 1:11). It takes heart at the spread of the gospel throughout the world (1:5 f.; 1 Thess 3:9; Col 2:5) and at the flourishing growth of missionary churches (Phil 4:10; cf. 1 Thess 2:20: "For you are our glory and joy"). But above all it is joy in the Lord (Phil 4:4). 360

The present period of trial and distress is limited. The Lord is at hand! (Phil 4:5; cf. 1 Thess 5:2 f.; 3:3). Hence joy is based primarily on the hope that after suffering together we shall be glorified together (Rom 8:17). This joyous and confident waiting for the day of Christ puts our present experience into true perspective. 360