



## Stand Firm in the Lord, Part 2 –Rejoice In the Lord Always

Series: *Philippians – To Live Is Christ*

Philippians 4:4

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As we return to Philippians 4 this morning, I want for us to remember what Paul is doing in this last chapter of his letter. Paul knows this may be the last time that he has a chance to write to the Philippians, to communicate with them and to share his heart. And more than anything else, what he wants for them is to stand firm in Christ, to stand firm in their faith.

Paul turns to some very practical principles in the rest of this section to help them do just that – 1) pursue gospel integrity in your relationships – we saw that last week and now 2) to be determined to rejoice in Christ. This is a very practical aspect of standing firm in Christ. If you are delighting in Christ, finding our joy and satisfaction in Him, you won't be looking other places for what only Jesus can give. So this exhortation to rejoice – it matters. Now as we look at this verse today, we need to take stock of this undeniable fact that this exhortation to rejoice is truly a command from the Lord.

**Rejoice – It really is a command.** When Paul tells us here in verse 4 to **“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.” (Philippians 4:4, ESV)**, we need to understand that this really is a command, as real and binding as the command to love your neighbor as yourself or to **“Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.” (Colossians 3:5, ESV)** This is a command from God, given for our good, which leads to His glory and which is an indispensable part of walking with Christ. Paul commands us to be a people who rejoice in Christ and walk in that joy.

**Can God really command our hearts like this?** He does it all the time. He commands us to love the Lord our God with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength and our neighbors as ourselves. He commands husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the church. He

commands us to long for the pure spiritual milk. And He commands us to rejoice in Him. And the reason that God can command our hearts as He desires is because He has given us new hearts. He has regenerated our hearts and renewed us by His grace. He has taken the stony heart from our flesh and put a heart of flesh in us, put His Spirit within us and written His law on our hearts. God can say to us: “I have made you alive; I have given you a new heart; I command that heart, and that heart is to rejoice in Me.” God commands us to rejoice in Him. Now, to be honest, this seems unusual to our ears because we have been misled into thinking about joy in the same way that we misthink about love. We hear all the time, and there are legions of songs to this effect, that love is only about feelings and spontaneous emotions that come over us that we have no ability to control. They just happen. And we kind of apply that same thinking to joy. But beloved that is a distortion of biblical truth.

Now, don't misunderstand what I am saying. I'm not saying that attraction does not exist. It does. I was drawn to my wife the first time I dated her. And I am not a non-romantic. You should romance your wife. Neither am I denying that it is far easier to rejoice at some times and in some circumstances than in others – it is. But what I am saying is that, according to Scripture, love and joy are far more than feelings and emotions and that they can either be cultivated or they can be quashed.

The command to rejoice is just as much a command as any other in Scripture and to fail to rejoice, to fail to repent of joylessness, to fail to pursue joy is just as much a sin as any other in Scripture. Before you tune me out and think me out of touch, stay with me. We'll come back to that thought in a few minutes. First, let's understand what Paul is saying when he commands us to rejoice.

**Rejoice – what does it mean?** When Paul commands us to rejoice, what is this spiritual joy, Christian joy? Joy is the attitude, the settled conviction, the soul-strengthening, stabilizing confidence that God loves you with an everlasting love as shown in the death and resurrection of Christ for your sake, and that He shepherds you faithfully in every circumstance of your life for your good and for His glory. Christian joy is not superficial happiness that can be devastated by illness, hardship, trial, broken relationships, difficulties, or any of the countless disappointments or changing circumstances of our lives. Instead, it is deep sense of confidence in God, in His sovereign care despite the circumstances, in the truth of the goodness of God's heart for His own – a confidence that is rooted in God's

demonstrated character, in the saving and sanctifying work of Jesus Christ, in divine providential care, in the spiritual blessings and promises of future glory, in His faithfulness to answer prayer and in the blessing of the fellowship of other Christians – that causes our souls to be at peace, but more than that to rejoice in the Lord – to be glad in God, to express His worth, to be filled with winsome satisfaction in Christ.

God commands us to rejoice because joy is a gift from God to His people. Psalm 4:7-8 says: **“You have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound. In peace I will both lie down and sleep; for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety.”** (Psalm 4:7–8, ESV) Then later in Psalm 16:11 we read: **“You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.”** (Psalm 16:11, ESV) God has given the gift of joy, an imperishable, impervious, durable joy to his people to be experienced and expressed.

It is a joy that comes from hearing and believing the words of Christ to us as His disciples, the word of forgiveness, the word of grace, the word of intimate fellowship with Him that results in life of fruitfulness and satisfaction, of which the world knows only shadows. It is a joy that comes from abiding in Jesus. You can see this so clearly in John 15: **“I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.”** (John 15:5–11, ESV)

It is a joy, a settled conviction, a Spirit-produced attitude, a gift given to everyone who receives and obeys God’s word, who feasts upon God’s Word, who has their mind continually renewed by the Word of God – that’s the key. Jeremiah, the prophet wrote: **“Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart, for I am called by your name, O Lord, God of hosts.”** (Jeremiah 15:16, ESV)

It is a conviction that comes by faith in Christ, that is nourished by love for Christ, and that is rooted in salvation: ***“Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”*** (1 Peter 1:8–9, ESV)

In other words, rejoicing in the Lord, a joy filled life is the normal Christian life. Joy in the Lord is something that should be true of every Christian life, no matter the circumstances. ***“Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will take joy in the God of my salvation. God, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the deer’s; he makes me tread on my high places.”*** (Habakkuk 3:17–19, ESV)

Biblical joy is so much greater than the world’s offer of happiness. Happiness is entirely circumstantial and utterly fragile. Happiness is dependent upon our current circumstances, what we have or do not have – wealth, popularity, respect, health, influence, position, a boyfriend or girlfriend, looks, ease, pleasant circumstances – you name it. Not so with joy. Joy is a gift of God to His people, purchased by Christ through His death and resurrection, a blood purchased gift to be received and walked in by faith. It is a gift but it is also an act of obedience, a duty to make ourselves joyful in the Lord. It is for every Christian. Do you see that? We are commanded to enjoy the gift of joy that God has given to us. ***Rejoice in the Lord.*** That’s the key – in the Lord. That is the sphere and source of our joy.

We find unshakable and durable joy in the eternal, faithful, covenant God who has loved us and drawn us to Him with irresistible love through Jesus Christ His Son. He is the great I AM, whose mercy endures forever, whose truth endures to all generations, who is excellent in power and in greatness. To delight in him is to behold his beauty in all its vast array: the symmetry of his attributes, the intricacies of his handiwork.

You find your joy in God the Father, in His eternal love to you when there was nothing in you to love. In His choosing you to be His child, in His justification of you in the suffering and death and resurrection of Christ, in the giving up of His only begotten, holy, well-pleasing Son to redeem you from Hell. We find our joy in Jesus Christ as our Brother, as our

Bridegroom, as our Shepherd, as our All in All, in Christ as Prophet, Priest and King, as our triumph over sin and savior from the wrath to come.

We find joy in God the Holy Spirit, in His regenerating work, making our dead souls to live and love God and His Christ, in His illumination of the Word of God to our hearts, in His grace that He gives to each of us in time of need, the strength He gives to you in temptation, the wisdom that He imparts to your souls, the faithfulness that He works in you, the way in which He is shaping you will of God and the grace of Christ ever more into the image of Jesus Christ. Delight that He is the promise of the full inheritance in the eternal presence of God. Beloved, we could go on forever. We have more than enough reasons to rejoice and God wants us to enjoy this gift of joy – He has given us Himself to enjoy – and that is why Paul commands it.

Charles Spurgeon said: **“I want you to notice, dear Friends, that this rejoicing is commanded. It is not a matter that is left to your option. It is not set before you as a desirable thing which you can do without—it is a positive precept of the Holy Spirit to all who are in the Lord—“Rejoice in the Lord always.” We ought to obey this precept because joy in the Lord makes us like God. He is the happy God—ineffable bliss is the atmosphere in which He lives and He would have His people to be happy. Let the devotees of Baal cut themselves with knives and lancets, and make hideous outcries if they will, but the servants of Jehovah must not even mar the corners of their beard! Even if they fast, they shall anoint their head and wash their face, that they appear not unto men to fast, for a joyous God desires a joyous people! You are commanded to rejoice, Brothers and Sisters, because this is for your profit. Holy joy will oil the wheels of your life’s machinery. Holy joy will strengthen you for your daily labor. Holy joy will beautify you and, as I have already said, give you an influence over the lives of others... Oh, do, then, listen to the text, for it is a command from God—“Rejoice in the Lord always!” May I just pause, here, and hand this commandment round to all of you who are members of this Church, and to all of you who are truly members of Christ? You are bid to rejoice in the Lord always! You are not allowed to sit there and fret and fume! You are not permitted to complain and groan. Mourner, you are commanded to put on beauty for ashes and the oil of joy for mourning! For this purpose your Savior came—the Spirit of the Lord is upon Him for this very end, that He might make you rejoice!”**

So Paul's command, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is ***“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.”*** The question, of course, is can Paul really mean this or is this just hyperbole?

**Can Paul really mean it when he says to “Rejoice in the Lord always”?** This seems kind of an ivory tower, disconnected from reality kind of thing to say, doesn't it? Can Paul really mean this? And the short answer is “Yes!” It helps us to remember that it is Paul whom God uses to make this command. If there was ever anyone who had to fight for joy in the midst of immense trials, it was Paul. He has been in jail for over two years, languishing in Rome. He's facing possible execution and had been the victim of unrighteous rulers. Though he should have been released, the Roman governor kept him in custody because he was hoping to receive a bribe from Paul and because he wanted to do the Jews a favor. The next governor also should have released him, but he was more concerned with his political position.

A great number of the pastors in Rome distanced themselves from Paul, treating him with disdain. They were preaching out of envy, selfish ambition, and strife and making his affliction worse. Paul could have made a case to be angry and depressed at the treatment he had received over the past few years. He was burdened by the external and internal attacks on the gospel, by the increasing and shameless ungodliness of society, by the loss of every creature comfort. He felt the weight of all that was going on in the world around him and the loss of his public ministry for Christ. He wasn't always happy about what he saw going on in the church. You would think that he would have been in need of the Philippians writing to cheer him up. But instead, this short letter to them is filled with joy. He models this command.

***“I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy,”*** (Philippians 1:3–4, ESV)

***“What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice,”*** (Philippians 1:18, ESV)

***“Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith,” (Philippians 1:25, ESV)***

***“complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.” (Philippians 2:2, ESV)***

***“Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all.” (Philippians 2:17, ESV)***

***“Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you.” (Philippians 3:1, ESV)***

***“Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.” (Philippians 4:1, ESV)***

It wasn't always easy for Paul to rejoice. He found it a great challenge at times, no doubt. Obviously Paul was not perfect in his obedience to this command any more than he was perfect in any of God's commands. Christ died as much for Paul's failure to rejoice as much as He did for His spiritual pride. There were times when Paul failed to rejoice as he should – he isn't sinless. But, and here is the big but, he did not make allowances for his failure to rejoice in Christ. He refused to remain in that condition. Let me say this again – Paul was not always able to keep this commandment blamelessly and more than you or I can. There were days because of remaining sin in him, because of tragedies that he saw around him and which he experienced, because of the weight of his circumstances he was in the depths, despondent, heavy hearted, but he did not make allowances or excuses but instead chose to pursue joy in Christ.

Look, there are going to be times for all of us when we are discouraged, disappointed, hurt, emotionally exhausted – whatever. That is part of being human in a sin cursed world. You will mourn when people you love die. You will ache when people you care about suffer. That is life. Sadness and grief are real, but there is a balm in Gilead. The joy that God offers to us

in Him, the joy that He commands us to pursue in Him, triumphs over all the pain of life and puts all of these things in perspective. It is joy in the Lord that is the source of our strength to stand firm in Christ. ***“The joy of the Lord is your strength.”*** (Nehemiah 8:10, ESV)

**Excuses and obstacles to rejoicing in the Lord.** I know all of the excuses that we give for not rejoicing in the Lord, for not living and walking in joy – I’ve used them. Some will say, “You know, that’s just not my temperament, it’s not my personality. Joy is a feeling and I can’t control how I feel.” If that’s true, then we are in a very disturbing place. Let me explain. If we allow our feelings to dominate us and become the benchmark for our obedience to God then we can justify living unproductive sub-Christian lives. If we are saying that we are at the whim of our emotions, at the mercy of our unpredictable impulses, then we have lost the battle for Christlikeness and Christ is no longer Lord; our emotions are.

We would never allow that excuse in society. It would be chaos. Would we let a murderer or rapist use the excuse in court, “I couldn’t help it. My emotions controlled me”? Of course not. And neither can we do that with our souls. The Psalmist didn’t. He took charge of his soul. ***“Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God.”*** (Psalm 43:5, ESV)

I’m going to say something very counter cultural here and anti-modern psychology, ok? Your temperament, or my temperament, is never an excuse. Your temperament is you. Your personality is you. It has been fashioned by the fall of Adam, fashioned in sin, and by our own sinful patterns of behavior. That is why we need to be renewed after the image of Christ. Some personality traits, some particular temperaments are sin. Paul was an impulsive, cruel, mean spirited man before he was saved. It is a sin to have a selfish, lustful, impatient, critical, melancholy, bad temper. We need to be renewed in our personality, as well as our minds. Look, I am not naturally a joyful person. I am sinfully predisposed to being in a bad mood, to being mean-spirited, to being melancholy. My wife is far more sunnier in her disposition than I am. I can get introspective and brooding. I’m just being honest here. That’s my Adamic nature. I can’t blame God for making me that way. Sin made me that way. And I can’t excuse a lack of joy in Christ by what I was before Christ. No one who is in Christ can and here’s why: ***“If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God...”*** (2 Corinthians 5:17–18, ESV)



Another way that we seek to justify our joylessness is by pointing to our circumstances. You know, the whole “If you knew what I go through, the circumstances I’m facing, the problems I deal with, you would realize why I’m not rejoicing in the Lord and why I have every right not to.” I have said that very thing to my wife. I can distinctly remember saying to her, not long ago, while in a foul mood, “I have every right to feel this way!” And my sunny-dispositioned wife responded in a most gentle way something along the lines of: “You’re out of line. Show me some Scripture on that.” She went there? Yes and she had every right to do so. If I am a professing believer in Christ then I should be ruled by the Word of Christ and the peace of Christ and not my circumstances. She’s like a modern day Katie Luther. Once Martin Luther spent three days in a black depression over something that had gone wrong. On the third day his wife came downstairs dressed in mourning clothes. “Who’s dead?” he asked her. “God,” she replied. Luther rebuked her, saying, “What do you mean, God is dead? God cannot die.” “Well,” she replied, “the way you’ve been acting I was sure He had!” Here’s what it comes down to – Can I really say there is something so different and so unique in my situation that I am exempt from this commandment? The answer is no.

Excuses go out the window and so must the obstacles to rejoicing in the Lord. Yes there are obstacles – our sins and others sins against us, the increasing godlessness of the age, the weight of our lives. There were often days when Paul looked at his life and said, “I can’t defend what I’ve done. I know it. That which I’ve done I hate. I feel like this – ‘O wretched man that I am.’” He knew how far he fell short. He was most conscious of wrong within his own soul. But His rejoicing was in Christ, in his accomplished redemption and present reign. It was not a rejoicing in all the things that he did or failed to do each day, because there were many things about which Paul couldn’t rejoice, but the foundation of His joy was in all that Christ was for him.

Let me close this morning with some:

### **Principles that govern a life of joy.**

**1) The Only True Source of Joy is Christ** – because He is the one who alone satisfies and can satisfy our hearts deepest needs. There is no lasting joy that and no durable joy apart from Christ. That is the reason for the world’s incessant pursuit of passing pleasures and empty and fictitious promises. Here’s the thing, it is in union with the Lord that we rejoice. If we look for happiness we will never find it; if we keep searching for joy we will never attain it;

but when our relationship with the Lord Jesus is right the result will be joy in him. So the Lord Jesus is the source of our joy. It is Him we must continually pursue. There is no substitute for time with the Lord. We must focus on His goodness and sufficiency. Read about Him in the Bible. Talk to Him in prayer. Spend time with Him in worship. Serve with Him in your daily walk. Learn about Him from others. The equation is simple: the closer you are to Him, the greater the experience of joy in your living. The initial joy of salvation cannot sustain a whole life of rejoicing. Yesterday's joy is a day late for today and that's why the command is ***“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.”***

## **2) The Pursuit of Joy Requires a Disciplined Determination To Not Be Satisfied With Less.**

Just as we can confuse the absence of open hostilities with peace, we can confuse temporary satisfaction or happiness with joy. We have to see the difference and refuse to let our lives be ruled by the lesser and failing light of happiness when joy is offered to us. Like CS Lewis says in *The Weight of Glory*: ***“It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.”***

**3) Joy's Presence or Absence In a Christian's Life Will Always Reveal Itself.** Where there is no joy, invariably other things will manifest themselves – overcompensation, excuses, justification for sin, “woe is me” dread, a “martyr-complex,” anxiety, isolation from other believers, negative and suspicious thoughts, lack of faith under the guise of being a “realist,” lack of concern for others under the guise of busyness, prayerlessness, self-absorption, spiritual dullness, lack of reading the Scriptures with effect, a complaining spirit, fault-finding, a lack of gratitude, and a lack of repentance. These are often outworking of joylessness.

But where a heart is ruled by joy in the Lord, there is openness and winsomeness, endurance and perseverance, hopefulness, confidence, a longing for fellowship and community with other believers, thinking the best of brothers and sisters in Christ, faith and trust, spiritual optimism, concern and regard for others' welfare, a willingness to lay down demands and desires for a greater good, prayer, spiritual vigor, hunger for the Word, humility, repentance, gratefulness, edifying heart toward other believers. This is the evidence of joy taken root in the heart. This is the evidence of joy in the Lord reigning over the soul.

Joy in the Lord is that serious. If joy and its fruit is absent in our hearts, the answer isn't self-justification or to ignore it and it will go away. The answer is to bring this sin to Christ, to confess it, to repent of it, and to lay hold of the joy He gladly died to give us.

That is the heart of lasting and unbreakable joy. And it is the gift that God gives to you in Christ. Lay hold of it.

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