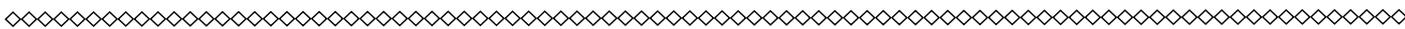




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Sermon Brief
Text: Phil. 4:4-9
Title: God's Church: A fun-loving Group
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Seeking to faithfully proclaim the whole council of God in scripture!



INTRODUCTION

Can Christians be fun loving people? With Karneval taking place this weekend in our city, I think this is a relevant question. The whole Karneval tradition is geared to having fun.¹ Some of it is clean and good, especially the opportunity to poke fun at politicians etc. The drunkenness and misbehavior is not good, however. And represents a false understanding of fun.

So in the midst of Karneval, is it appropriate to ask whether Christians can be fun loving or not? I think so, and this afternoon I want to speak to that theme from Phil. 4:4-9.



4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. 5 Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. 6 Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. 8 Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. 9 Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you. [NRSV]²

Paul's letter to the Philippians was written most likely in the early 60s, probably while Paul was under house arrest in Rome. Epaphroditus had arrived in Rome from Philippi with news about the church, and also with a love offering of financial support for Paul during his time in Rome (cf. Phil. 4:15-20). The letter is Paul's response to their support of his ministry.

One of the key themes throughout the letter is that of Christian joy and rejoicing. A Greek word is foundational here: the noun χαρά³ shows up some 5 times in the letter, while the verb form χαίρω⁴ shows up nine times in Philippians. The noun is usually



¹"Carnival - known in German as Karneval, Fastnacht, Fasching, Fassenacht, or Fasnet, depending on the region - has its roots in the spring celebrations of pre-Christian times, when people wore masks to scare away winter spirits and welcomed the rebirth of nature with singing and dancing. Today it is observed mainly in Catholic regions as a season of feasting and fun before the fasting period of Lent." [Source: Welcome to Germany.info]

²4.4 Χαίρετε ἐν κυρίῳ πάντοτε· πάλιν ἐρώ, χαίρετε. 4.5 τὸ ἐπιεικὲς ὑμῶν γνωσθήτω πᾶσιν ἀνθρώποις. ὁ κυρίου ἐγγύς. 4.6 μηδὲν μεριμνᾶτε, ἀλλ' ἐν παντὶ τῇ προσευχῇ καὶ τῇ δεήσει μετὰ εὐχαριστίας τὰ αἰτήματα ὑμῶν γνωρίζεσθε πρὸς τὸν θεόν. 4.7 καὶ ἡ εἰρήνη τοῦ θεοῦ ἢ ὑπερέχουσα πάντα νοῦν φρουρήσει τὰς καρδίας ὑμῶν καὶ τὰ νοήματα ὑμῶν ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ.

4.8 Τὸ λοιπόν, ἀδελφοί, ὅσα ἐστὶν ἀληθῆ, ὅσα σεμνά, ὅσα δίκαια, ὅσα ἀγνά, ὅσα προσφιλῆ, ὅσα εὐφρημα, εἴ τις ἀρετὴ καὶ εἴ τις ἔπαινος, ταῦτα λογίσεσθε· 4.9 ἃ καὶ ἐμάθετε καὶ παρελάβετε καὶ ἠκούσατε καὶ εἶδετε ἐν ἐμοί, ταῦτα πράσσετε· καὶ ὁ θεὸς τῆς εἰρήνης ἔσται μεθ' ὑμῶν.

³χαρά, ᾤ, ἡ (1) literally joy, as a feeling of inner happiness, rejoicing, gladness, delight (MT 2.10); (2) by metonymy; (a) the person or thing that is the cause or object of joy or happiness (LU 2.10; PH 4.1); (b) a state or condition of happiness or blessedness (MT 25.21; HE 12.2) [source: Timothy Friberg, Barbara Friberg and Neva F. Miller, vol. 4, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, Baker's Greek New Testament library (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2000), 406.]

χαρά chara; joy, delight:— greatly(1), joy(54), joyful(1), joyfully(1), joyously(1), rejoicing(1). [source: Robert L. Thomas, *New American Standard Hebrew-Aramaic and Greek Dictionaries: Updated Edition* (Anaheim: Foundation Publications, Inc., 1998, 1981), H8674.]

⁴χαίρω impf. ἔχαIRON; 2aor. pass. ἐχάρην; 2fut. pass. χαρήσομαι; (1) rejoice, be glad, be delighted (JN 3.29); with the participle used adverbially with other verbs gladly, with joy, joyfully (LU 19.6); (2) used as a formula of greeting or address in the imperative implying a wish for well-being χαίρε, χαίρετε welcome, good morning, hail (to you), hello (MT 26.49); at the beginning of a letter χαίρειν greetings! (AC 15.23; 23.26); at the end of a letter farewell (2C 13.11); (3) passive be glad, be happy, rejoice (LU 6.23; 2C 7.13) [source: Timothy Friberg, Barbara Friberg and Neva F. Miller, vol. 4, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, Baker's

translated as 'joy,' and the verb as 'rejoice.' But they come from the same root word in Greek: χαρ. In his letter Paul expresses profound joy and happiness both in his own circumstance -- ironically, imprisonment -- and about the Philippian believers.

We can learn much from Paul's insight here.

BODY

I. Live joyfully, vv. 4-7

In verses 4-7, there comes a foundational admonition in doublet expression in verse 4. This is followed by two sets of admonitions that together expand Paul's idea of rejoicing with closely related concepts. From this then comes the fuller expression of Christian joy.

Note the admonitions to rejoice: "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice" (*Χαίρετε ἐν κυρίῳ πάντοτε· πάλιν ἐρῶ, χαίρετε*). The two admonitions *χαίρετε* are in the Greek present imperative verb form, which stresses the ongoing demand to rejoice. Paul desires that rejoicing be a continuing virtue expressed by the believers, not just a spasmodic outburst of joy. The continuing obligation to rejoice is further reinforced by the adverb *πάντοτε* meaning 'always' or 'at all times.'⁵ The repeating of the same admonition serves to intensify the demand.



Paul then felt that rejoicing was a significant Christian trait that should be an important part of the believer's living, and of the church's life.

What then is rejoicing? And how do you do it? Some background out of Paul's world is important for grasping what the apostle had in mind, and not falsely superimposing current western ideas down onto Paul's words. The idea of joy and rejoicing in the world of Paul was a mixed picture. In Greek philosophy *joy* (*χαρά*) stood opposed to *logos* (*λόγος*), 'reason,' and thus was viewed with suspicion, if not hostility.⁶ This was particularly true of Stoicism, which looked upon joy as defective judgment, since it was an emotion. So it is out of Paul's Jewish religious heritage that he gained a positive view of the idea of joy.

Hans Conzelmann (*TWNT abridged*, Logos Systems) depicts that heritage this way:

B. The OT. In the OT the experience and expression of joy are close, as the terms for joy (usually *śmh*) and its expression show. Joy expresses the whole person and aims at sharing, as in festal joy. God's work of salvation is a chief occasion (Pss. 5:11; 9:2; 16:9, etc.). The law is an object in Ps. 119:14, the word of God in Jer. 15:16. Joy is a reward for faithfulness to the law in Is. 65:13-14. There is joy at weddings (Jer. 25:10) and at harvest (Is. 9:2). God himself rejoices (Is. 65:19), and thanksgiving demands joy (Dt. 16:13ff.). Feasts offer occasions for joy before God (Dt. 2:7). Hymnal jubilation expresses devotion to God (Joel 2:21). In accordance with its inner intention, OT joy culminates in eschatology (Pss. 14:7; 126:2; Is. 9:2; 12:6, etc.). High points in the prophets carry the call: *chaïre* (Zeph. 3:14ff.; Joel 2:21 ff.; Zech. 9:9-10).

C. Judaism. 1. Qumran. At Qumran we find the OT motifs of joy in God, of God's own joy, and of eschatological

Greek New Testament library (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2000), 406.]

χαίρω *chaïrō*; a prim. vb.; to rejoice, be glad— am glad(1), glad(7), gladly(1), greeted*(1), greeting(2), greetings(4), hail(4), joyfully(1), make(1), rejoice(33), rejoiced(8), rejoices(2), rejoicing(10). [source: Robert L. Thomas, *New American Standard Hebrew-Aramaic and Greek Dictionaries*: Updated Edition (Anaheim: Foundation Publications, Inc., 1998, 1981), H8674.]

⁵67.88 *πάντοτε; ἐκάστοτε*: duration of time, with reference to a series of occasions—'always, at all times, on every occasion.' *πάντοτε*: οὐκ ἀφῆκέν με μόνον, ὅτι ἐγὼ τὰ ἀρεστὰ αὐτῷ ποιῶ πάντοτε 'he has not left me alone because I always do what pleases him' Jn 8.29; *πάντοτε* *μνησθῆναι σου ποιούμενος ἐπὶ τῶν προσευχῶν μου* 'every time I pray, I mention you' Phm 4. *ἐκάστοτε*: σπουδάσω δὲ καὶ ἐκάστοτε ἔχειν ὑμᾶς μετὰ τὴν ἐμὴν ἐξοδὸν τὴν τούτων μνήμην ποιῆσθαι 'I will do my best to provide a way for you to remember these matters at all times after my death' 2 Pe 1.15. [source; Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, electronic ed. of the 2nd edition. (New York: United Bible societies, 1996, c1989), 1:640.]

⁶*chaïrō*, *chará*, *synchaïrō*.

A. Secular Greek.

1. Usage. a. As a phenomenon or feeling, "joy" is a culmination of being that raises no problems as such and that strains beyond itself. b. *chaïrō* means "to rejoice," "to be merry." *chaïre* serves as a morning greeting. It is above all a greeting to the gods and is a stereotyped ending to hymns. The verb is also an epistolary formula in greetings from sender to recipient. c. *chará* means "rejoicing," "joy," "merriness."

2. Philosophy. a. Philosophy reflects on joy. For Plato it is much the same as *hēdonē*. b. *hēdonē* almost completely replaces it in Aristotle with little distinction. c. For the Stoics *chará* is a special instance of *hēdonē*. Since the Stoics regard emotions as defective judgment of the *lógos*, they tend to view *chará* negatively. But they mitigate this verdict by classifying it as a "good mood" of the soul rather than an emotion (*páthē*).

3. Religious Connection. Hellenism uses *chará* for festal joy. It takes on an eschatological character in expectations of a world savior.

[source: Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich and Geoffrey William Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Translation of: Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1995, c1985), 1299.]

joy. The elect can rejoice in spite of present suffering because they know that they are in God's hand. 2. Rabbinic Writings. Here, too, we find festal joy, which God gives and into which it is a duty to enter. Joy is joy before God. The meal is part of the joyful festival. A significant thought is that of perfect future joy. 3. Philo. The group is a significant one in Philo. He relates joy to religious "intoxication." Joy is a supreme "good mood." It is the opposite of fear. Isaac is its OT symbol. God is the giver of joy, and its objects are health, freedom, honor, the good, the beautiful, and worship. While joy is a "good mood" Philo does not view it in Stoic fashion as a self-achieved harmony of soul. Joy is native to God alone; we find it only in God. It comes with virtue and wisdom. But this is possible only on the presupposition that by way of the *lógos* God himself is the giver.

Thus one should not be surprised to find a large emphasis upon joy in Paul's writings. Paul experiences joy and writes about joy out of his Jewish heritage that found excitement concerning the Lord to be natural and appropriate. He was called upon to preach this message to a culture that experienced very little joy, and, at least, in the most elite circles of ancient Greco-Roman society were suspicious of joy as a potential danger to rational thinking.

Conzelmann (*TWNTa*, Logos Systems) describes Paul's use of the word group this way:

a. For Paul *chará* is the joy of faith (Phil. 1:25) and a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22). God's kingdom is joy (Rom. 14:17). Joy and hope are related (Rom. 12:12). Its opposite is affliction (cf. Rom. 5:1 ff.). Joy actualizes freedom and takes shape in fellowship (12:15). Paul wants to come with joy (15:32). Joy is reciprocal (Phil. 2:28-29). Joy is in God (1 Th. 3:9) or in the Lord (Phil. 3:1). In the relation between Paul and the church, joy is eschatological; the church will be his joy (1 Th. 2:19). The mood of Philippians is one of joy (1:4). This is joy at the preaching of Christ (1:18). It is future joy experienced as joy in the present. (4:1). As the joy of faith it includes a readiness for martyrdom (1:25). This joy maintains itself in face of affliction (2 Cor. 7:4ff.). Paul himself, like the Lord, is an example in this regard (1 Th. 1:6). Paul's apostolic authority works for the joy of the church (2 Cor. 1:24). He rejoices in his own weakness when it means the church's strength (13:9).

b. There is nothing new in later works. *cháirō* occurs in Col. 1:24; 2:5, and *chará* in Col. 1:11; 2 Tim. 1:4. The most important aspect is that of joy in suffering.

Thus, in Paul's writings collectively we see the Jewish heritage being expressed through Christian experience. Joy comes from God as a gift; as such, it has a quality and tone about it that goes beyond physical pleasure of some sort. It is an emotion, but it is deeper than a good feeling. Joy comes out of relationships. Most of all, one's relationship with God is the source of joy. But joy is found in ministry to others and in their reciprocating ministry back to you. Our brothers and sisters in Christ are people who provide us real joy. Non-Christian friends can produce fun experiences, but the joy that Paul is talking about comes only from Christian friends.

The noun *χαρά* shows up some 5 times⁷ in the letter to the Philippians, while the verb form *χαίρω* shows up 9 times⁸ in Philippians. A quick overview of these instances provides a better picture of the emphasis on joy in this book of the New Testament. Paul prays with joy for the Philippians (1:4); he wants the Philippians to deepen their joy in their faith (1:25); he asks them to make him happy by being united (2:2); he asks the church to welcome Epaphroditus with complete joy as he returns to Philippi from Rome (2:29); the Philippians are Paul's joy as he anticipates final judgment (4:1).

Christian joy, then, has many settings and connections. It is focused on God and ministry to others. In our relationship with God and people we indeed find joy and fun.

But in the context of Phil. 4:2-7, Christian joy has a shape and contour which gives it distinction and uniqueness. Growing out of the twofold admonition to rejoice (v. 4) comes a set of amplifications expanding the idea of joy. Their formula structure suggests a fixed pattern that Paul is most likely drawing upon, rather

⁷Php 1:4 always offering prayer with **joy** in my every prayer for you all,

Php 1:25 And convinced of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and **joy** in the faith,

Php 2:2 make my **joy** complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.

Php 2:29 Therefore receive him in the Lord with all **joy**, and hold men like him in high regard;

Php 4:1 Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my **joy** and crown, so stand firm in the Lord, my beloved.

⁸Php 1:18 What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I **rejoice**, yes, and I will **rejoice**.

Php 2:17 But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I **rejoice** and share my **joy** with you all.

Php 2:18 And you too, I urge you, **rejoice** in the same way and share your **joy** with me.

Php 2:28 Therefore I have sent him all the more eagerly in order that when you see him again you may **rejoice** and I may be less concerned about you.

Php 3:1 Finally, my brethren, **rejoice** in the Lord. To write the same things again is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you.

Php 4:4 **Rejoice** in the Lord always; again I will say, **rejoice!**

Php 4:10 But I **rejoiced** in the Lord greatly, that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned before, but you lacked opportunity.

than creating them new.

First is the admonition / warning (v. 5): “Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near” (τὸ ἐπιεικὲς ὑμῶν γνωσθήτω πᾶσιν ἀνθρώποις. ὁ κύριος ἐγγύς). In the structuring of the ideas, Paul links up Christian gentleness to joy and rejoicing. How does that work? All of us have been around people who in having fun become so overbearing that we look for ways to get away from them. Their sense of “fun” repulses people. What Paul is advocating here, in my opinion, is a Christian joy mingled with gentleness so that our joy attracts people, rather than pushes them away. There’s a wholesomeness to our joy and excitement that is appealing. In our excitement to serve God we don’t become overbearing so that other people are uncomfortable around us. Just the opposite should be the case. Then, and only then, does Christian joy become infectious so that other people want what we have. The warning, “the Lord is at the door,” calls us to take seriously this responsibility. The image is of Christ standing just outside the door both hearing everything and also prepared at any moment to walk through the door. That is, He knows absolutely everything we’re doing. His return to hold us accountable for our actions could come at any moment. Thus, our experience of Christian joy must be mingled with Christian gentleness! God will require this of us in final judgment.

The second set of amplifications comes in the form of a traditional command / promise rhetorical structure (vv. 6-7): “Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (μηδὲν μεριμνᾶτε, ἀλλ’ ἐν παντὶ τῇ προσευχῆς καὶ τῇ δεήσει μετὰ εὐχαριστίας τὰ αἰτήματα ὑμῶν γνωρίζεσθω πρὸς τὸν θεόν. καὶ ἡ εἰρήνη τοῦ θεοῦ ἢ ὑπερέχουσα πάντα νοῦν φρουρήσει τὰς καρδίας ὑμῶν καὶ τὰ νοήματα ὑμῶν ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ.). Here a doublet -- negative/positive -- command (don’t...but do...) is followed by a divine promise (peace will guard). Profound insight is contained in these words.



In the command, we are not to worry, but to take our concerns to God. To be sure, Paul’s command here to not worry, *μηδὲν μεριμνᾶτε*, stresses worry at an intense level.⁹ We should be concerned about problems in our lives. But we must not let those concerns overwhelm us and pull us away from God. But that’s always the temptation when hardships come our way. They push us inward and cause us to focus negatively on problems and the bad that may happen. Most importantly, worry can easily lead us to step away from God and our relationship with Him. Thus Paul in couching this admonition in the present imperative of the Greek stresses that we are never to worry. Or, if we’re already worrying, we must stop it immediately.¹⁰ His words are very strong. Worry has no legitimate place in the believer’s life.

Christian joy does not blind us to the harsh realities of daily living in a sinful world. Sometimes critics of Christianity will claim that believers are naive and live in a phantasy world of denial of reality. Among some Christian groups, the emphasis on joy and excitement in religious experience becomes an escape mechanism to allow folks to pretend that hard realities don’t exist in their life. Paul denies the legitimacy of both these approaches. Our sense of joy and excitement in our faith exists in full acknowledgement that life is often hard and difficult. But the way we approach that harshness is the difference. When we face such moments, we don’t fret and fume over them so that they paralyze us, or ‘get us down.’ No, not at all! Paul’s challenge to us is to take such burdens to God. With proper praying, we lay them at God’s feet and trust Him to take care of things. Four elements to this are present here. *We use ‘prayer’ (τῇ προσευχῆς), not worry, to deal with our problems.* Christian joy comes in by our realizing that no problem can slap us in the face alone. We always as believers have access to our Heavenly Father. He is poised to come along side us to help us cope and find solutions. We but have to ask Him to help us. *Second we use ‘supplication’ (τῇ δεήσει), not worry, to deal with our problems.* Supplication is request.¹¹ We are encouraged to ask God for His help. We don’t automatically

⁹25.225 μεριμνάω: (derivative of μέριμνα ‘worry,’ 25.224) to have an anxious concern, based on apprehension about possible danger or misfortune—‘to be worried about, to be anxious about.’ τίς δὲ ἐξ ὑμῶν μεριμνῶν δύναται ἐπὶ τὴν ἡλικίαν αὐτοῦ προσθεῖναι πῆχυν; ‘can any of you live a bit longer by worrying about it?’ Lk 12.25; μὴ μεριμνήσητε πῶς ἢ τί λαλήσητε ‘do not worry about how or what you are going to say’ Mt 10.19. [Source: Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, electronic ed. of the 2nd edition. (New York: United Bible societies, 1996, c1989), 1:312.]

¹⁰The prohibitive imperative present tense verb in ancient Greek demanded either immediate cessation of action (in historicized circumstances), or demanded the prevention of action from ever occurring as an ongoing experience (in timeless, gnomic uses). The context here favors the latter use of the verb, but not conclusively.

¹¹Δέσις is petitionary prayer; ‘supplication.’ Paul alone joins it with προσευχή, which is the more general term for prayer. (See Phil. 4:6; Eph. 6:18; 1 Tim. 2:1.) Προσευχή is limited to prayer to God, while δέσις may be addressed to man. (See Trench, N.T. Syn. li.; Schmidt, Synon. 7, 4; Ellic. on 1 Tim. 2:2; Eph. 6:18.) [source: Marvin Richardson Vincent, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles to the Philippians and to Philemon* (New York: C. Scribner’s sons, 1897), 6.]

assume that He will come to our aid. He awaits our request. *Third, we use 'requests', (τὰ αἰτήματα ὑμῶν) not worry, to deal with our problems.* Although closely connected to 'supplication' the point is that we bring our problems to God and name them one by one to Him as we ask for His help. Important here is to note that we make *requests* of God, not *demands* upon God. Implicit here is reverence toward and respect for God. We have no right to expect anything from Him. But He has encouraged us to make requests for His help. *Finally, we use 'thanksgiving,' (εὐχαριστίας) not worry, to deal with our problems.* Prayer coupled with joy always brings us before God with gratitude and thanksgiving. Thus we bring our problems to God thankful that He allows us to do so, thankful that He cares about us, thankful that He hears and answers our prayers.

The divine promise in verse seven pledges that God will set up a defense parameter¹² around our heart to protect us against the harsh issues we are facing. God doesn't promise to exempt us from going through hardships. But here He does promise to protect our hearts as we come to grips with these hardships. Important to this is what is meant by 'heart' (*καρδία*). In the Greco-Roman and Jewish worlds of the first century, the heart was a figure of speech not for human emotions -- as in the English speaking modern world -- but for the volitional aspect, the choosing, deciding, decision making part of us. When we turn our problems over to God, His promise is to protect our decision making on how to cope with and how to solve our problems. In other words, God promises to guide us through the hard times helping us make the right decisions in order to get through them successfully. Beautifully Paul declares that God's peace is a dynamic force at work inside the believer that provides wisdom and insight not available to mere human understanding. This peace is so profound and knowledgeable of our situation that it "*surpasses all understanding,*" (*ἡ ὑπερέχουσα πάντα νοῦν*). When we try to solve our problems ourselves all we can bring to the table is our own understanding and perhaps that of friends. But even put together, such collective knowledge still represents only limited human grasping of the situation. Far better then is to turn the problems over to God, since He provides knowledge of the situation and how best to cope with it that goes way beyond human understanding.

Thus Christian joy has a distinct texture to it. It is excitement about serving God that is permeated with gentleness and with reaching out to God for help with our problems. We absolutely refuse to be overwhelmed by any hardship that comes our way. In the realization of God's help and presence in our lives, we indeed find even greater joy and excitement.

This joy is wonderful! It blesses our lives! It doesn't leave hangovers, like the fun seekers at Karneval this week are going to have. It won't vanish on Tuesday with the end of Karneval. We can live with joyful happiness and excitement every day of our lives as believers. Do you know this kind of joy?

II. Live reflectively, vv. 8-9

In the last two verses of our passage, Paul balances joy and excitement in Christian living with meditation and reflection. Christianity is both joyful excitement about God and at the same time contemplative reflection on the things of God. Both sides of Christian experience are important and necessary in order to balance each other.

The final segment of the passage also follows a doublet command / promise pattern, but with different content and arrangement than in vv. 6-7. He merges into this structure a virtue list as well in verse 6.

whatever is true,
whatever is honorable,
whatever is just,
whatever is pure,
whatever is pleasing,
whatever is commendable,

if there is any excellence and
if there is anything worthy of praise,

think about these things.

Keep on doing the things

that you have learned
and received
and heard
and seen in me,

and

the God of peace will be with you.

¹²The Greek verb *φρουρέω*, when used in military settings, stressed an army building a defense parameter around the encampment in order to protect the soldiers from surprise attack from enemies.

Both commands are positive in nature and represent a “step” parallelism. First, we are to think about some things, then we are to do some things. The second builds off the first in advancing the thought. Once these prerequisites have been met, the divine promise is for God’s peace to be with us.

Paul first calls upon believers to think. The Greek verb *λογίζεσθε* is used and stresses ongoing consideration of the aforementioned items. These things we are to focus our minds on, ponder them, let them saturate our thoughts and shape the way we think. In other words, our minds should be filled with positive things.

Paul set forth six categories of thought, followed by two all inclusive groups of items, as the positive items we are to ponder. Moisés Silva in the Baker Commentary provides some helpful insight into these items:¹³

More important is the substance of this list, since it contains five terms that are not particularly common in the Pauline letters: *σεμνός* (*semmnos*, honorable, noble; occurs in the Pastorals); *ἄγνός* (*hagnos*, pure; 2 Cor. 7:11; 11:2; also in the Pastorals); *προσφιλής* (*prospihilēs*, lovely, winsome; nowhere else in the NT); *εὐφήμος* (*euphēmos*, of good repute; also a NT hapax legomenon, though the noun *euphēmia* occurs in 2 Cor. 6:8); *ἀρετή* (*aretē*, excellence, virtue; nowhere else in Paul). Moreover, the term *ἔπαινος* (*epainos*, praise), though relatively common in Paul, occurs here in an unusual passive sense (“worthy of praise”), and some writers infer that it reflects the Greek ethical use of the word with reference to the society’s approval of human conduct.⁵

On the basis of these data and the fact that moral philosophers sometimes used similar lists of virtues, Hawthorne (following other scholars) argues that Paul is here appealing to the Philippians’ cultural background, that is, to their familiarity with current pagan morality: “You must not fail to live up to the ideals of your fellow men, which were also your ideals, before you were converted.”⁶ It is of course true that Paul’s lists, like many other elements in his style, reflect the world in which he lived. Moreover, the note of citizenship characteristic of this letter (1:27; 3:21) may be thought to support some allusion to civic duty.

On the other hand, Paul’s very use of the citizenship motif is intended to draw the Philippians’ attention to their higher Christian allegiance, and that is surely the case here as well. The idea that at this point in the letter Paul descends from such heights and asks his brothers merely to act like well-behaved Greek citizens can hardly be taken seriously. Given the broad context of the epistle as a whole, the narrower context of 3:2–4:9 (see esp. Schenk 1984: 270), and the immediate context of verse 9 in particular, we must understand Paul’s list as representing distinctly Christian virtues (though we need not deny that many non-Christian citizens exemplify such virtues in their lives).

When we fill our thoughts with all these positive virtues, we then need to take action on them. Christian reflection and meditation is not an end within itself. Rather, it is a means to a large end. Thus the second admonition naturally follows: *think, then do*.

Paul’s admonition for the Philippians to practice certain things takes the positive thoughts mentioned and concretizes them as expressed in Paul’s own living: “Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me,...” (*ἃ καὶ ἐμάθετε καὶ παρελάβετε καὶ ἠκούσατε καὶ εἶδετε ἐν ἐμοί, ταῦτα πράσσετε*). From the instruction and observation of the apostle and how he lived, the Philippians could determine how the positive values they were to consider could be expressed in daily living. In a day before a New Testament scripture, believers even more than later needed to see the Christian life modeled before them. Yet, still today we often define the Christian life by the example we see in particularly godly individuals we know. They help us see how to implement the principles of Christian living taught in scripture.

Once again, the God of peace promises to stand with us when we think about and then practice authentic Christian values: “and the God of peace will be with you” (*καὶ ὁ θεὸς τῆς εἰρήνης ἔσται μεθ’ ὑμῶν*). God’s peace is not merely the absence of trouble, even trouble between us and God. The ancient concept of peace (*εἰρήνη*) in the New Testament builds off the Hebrew concept of peace in the Old Testament, *šālôm* (שָׁלוֹם). Although peace includes the absence of trouble, the Hebrew concept places greater emphasis on the positive side, the presence of God’s goodness that brings wholeness to our lives.¹⁴

When the God of peace stands with us through life, we are complete. Our lives are sound and solid as a rock. We have real substance to our existence. Thus joy, authentic Christian joy, fills us with contentment and happiness that the pagan world can’t comprehend. We experience excitement in life through serving God and others that the non-believing world can’t grasp because of its preoccupation with self.



¹³Moisés Silva, *Philippians*, 2nd ed., *Baker exegetical commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 197.

¹⁴“In English, the word ‘peace’ conjures up a passive picture, one showing an absence of civil disturbance or hostilities, or a personality free from internal and external strife. The biblical concept of peace is larger than that and rests heavily on the Hebrew root *slm*, which means ‘to be complete’ or ‘to be sound.’ The verb conveys both a dynamic and a static meaning — ‘to be complete or whole’ or ‘to live well.’” [source: “Peace,” *Baker’s Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*]

Rejoice

CONCLUSION

Here my beloved church is joy -- real joy. The Karneval fun seekers are chasing momentary excitement that mostly leaves an empty feeling at the end. The let down coming from their hangovers pushes them back into the traditional dark existence through the German winter months. But praise God! We believers have something infinitely better. We know the joy of the Lord and have experienced the joy of His

Rejoice

salvation. That joy stays with us through thick and thin; it fills our life with lasting happiness. It makes daily living a fun adventure of discovering the presence and leadership of God in each moment of the day.

Folks, my deep prayer as your pastor is simply this: "Dear God, make us a fun-loving group of people who love You and love one another."

pastor is simply this: "Dear God, ple who love You and love one an-

Rejoice