

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS
Commentary by Michael Sigler
(Guest Commentary during August by
Walter Albritton – walbritton@elmore.rr.com)
August 22, 2010

Growing in Joy and Peace

Philippians 4:2-14

Key verse: 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. (Philippians 4:9)

The stated purpose of this lesson is to “reclaim” the joy and peace that we found in knowing Jesus as Savior and Lord. So if joy and peace need to be “reclaimed,” then somehow we must have “lost” these precious fruits of the Spirit. **Contention** with fellow believers is often what robs us of our joy and peace. It is no accident that Paul’s discussion of joy and peace follows his admonition to two women in the Philippian Church to settle their differences. I like the way Eugene Peterson translates Paul’s counsel to Euodia and Syntyche: *“I urge Euodia and Syntyche to iron out their differences and make up. God doesn’t want his children holding grudges.”* **(The Message)**

While God surely does not want his children to have conflict with one another, the reality is that strife happens – even within the fellowship of believers. Paul does not indicate that one woman is guiltier than the other. Both women are his friends and his co-workers in the work of the Gospel. Both should accept responsibility for their disagreement and do whatever is necessary to restore their friendship. Paul appeals to one of the church’s leaders to “help” the two women. Sometimes leaders within the body of Christ can help resolve conflict with a calm request that people put aside their differences and make peace with each other.

Why is there discord among Christians? Paul explains why in his Letter to the Galatians. The reason is **carnality**, the desires of the flesh “warring” against the Spirit. Carnality is our “sinful nature” doing what is contrary to the Spirit. Discord, jealousy, dissensions, and envy are, Paul says, “acts of the sinful nature.” The remedy, says Paul, is to live by, or walk in, the Spirit “and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh” (Galatians 5:16). Paul warns us that “the flesh” must be “crucified.” This means that I must “deny” myself in order to walk in the Spirit. To do so is to walk no easy road!

Pious believers may insist, “I am not carnal!” Oswald Chambers addresses this helpfully in **My Utmost for His Highest**. Chambers says if we are quarrelsome and easily upset over small things, such attitudes prove our carnality. The way to deal with our carnality, he says, is to confess it when the Spirit brings it to our attention: “When the light

shines and the Spirit brings conviction of sin, be a child of the light. Confess your wrongdoing, and God will deal with it.” Once the Spirit has forgiven you, and removed this carnality from your heart, Chambers says, “You will never cease to be the most amazed person on earth at what God has done for you on the inside.” To which I must add, **Amen!**

When we allow the Spirit to do a work of grace in us, our new freedom is good reason to **rejoice!** The church is a place of rejoicing. It was for me growing up. I can still recall the fun we had as children and young people singing the lively chorus, “Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice!” I believe my attitude toward life was shaped in my formative years by the singing of such wonderful songs about the joy of the Lord.

It behooves us to work diligently within the fellowship to see that discord is quickly overwhelmed by love and forgiveness so that each of us can affirm that “the joy of the Lord is our strength.” And always our joy is based not on the absence of trials and trouble, but the reality that our Risen Lord is with us and is always “working for our good” in all our circumstances. By faith we embrace the hope that nothing can happen to us that the Lord cannot use for our good and His glory!

The **presence** of our Lord is also the source of our **peace**. When trouble comes we remember that our Lord’s name is Emmanuel – God with us! When the night is dark, and we cannot see, God is with us! When tears of grief blind us for the moment, God is with us! When tribulation brings us to our knees, we still declare, God is with us! He has promised to be with us and He keeps his promises! Hallelujah! When disappointment has us by the nap of the neck, we still cry out, God is with us! And praise God, even in the worst of storms, we are steadied by God’s peace, that beautiful peace of soul that “surpasses all understanding,” and keeps us focused not on the storm but on our Lord Jesus, the Prince of Peace! He is still able to still the storms that arise in our lives!

Paul dares to ask the Philippian believers to follow his **example**. That is not easy for any of us to do – to ask others to follow our example. But Paul was not bloated with pride; he realized that he **had** to be a good example to fellow Christians. He had to practice what he preached and while he knew himself not to be perfect, he also knew it was necessary to show fellow disciples how to live by faith. He accepted both his frailties and his responsibilities.

My own walk with the Spirit has been wonderfully strengthened by the examples of fellow Christians whom I have admired. Early in my life three preachers influenced me greatly. They were men in whom I found no guile – Si Mathison, Griffin Lloyd, and Paul Duffey. I never heard either of them speak ill of another person. Each was “full” of Christ. Each was devoted to Christ. From their example I saw the road I needed to travel and how to become the Christian I longed to be. Like Paul, they were not perfect but their examples helped me find peace with God as I sought to serve the Christ.

Albert Schweitzer once said, “There is only one way to influence people and that is by example.” If Schweitzer was right, and I believe he was, then each of us must pray for

sufficient grace to be constantly filled with the joy and peace of Christ so that by our example, we may do our part in changing the world.

When contention rears its ugly head in our fellowship, we must repent and confess our part in it, allowing God to cleanse us and restore damaged relationships. Only God can heal our brokenness and “make something beautiful of our lives.” By his grace, and by walking in the Spirit, and in spite of our frailties, we can set a good example for others to follow, and we should settle for nothing less! We can be known as people who are constantly growing in joy and peace!