The Upward Call of God in Christ Jesus by Greg Bowen
Philippians 3:7-21
January 12, 2025
Sermon Notes

(See the Meditation on the back.)

Meditation

The secret of joy for believers lies in the fine art of Christian thinking. It is by this means that the Holy Spirit, over and above His occasional visitations in special moments of joy, regularly sustains in us the joy that marks us out as Christ's. Our Lord Jesus wants our joy to be full. Certainly He has made abundant provision for our joy. And if we focus our minds on the facts from which joy flows, springs of joy will well up in our hearts every day of our lives. This upwelling of joy will turn our ongoing pilgrimage through this world into an experience of contentment and exaltation of which the world knows nothing. From this experience will come strength for service. Joy—that is, rejoicing in the Lord—is thus a basic discipline of the Christian life, essential to spiritual health and vitality. Few Christians seem to understand this, and fewer still seem to practice the discipline with diligence. But what a difference it makes when we do!

Sixty years ago I was close to a certain Christian family. Spiritually I owe more to them than I think they ever realized. Life was not easy for them. The father died young, after being immobilized for years by heart disease. The daughter never grew normally and died in her teens of rheumatic fever. One son was so (handicapped) that he had to be institutionalized. The mother remarried but died of cancer in middle age. Thereafter her second husband lived alone for some years, totally housebound with crippling arthritis.

When I visited him, his gentle, sunny joyfulness in Christ, free from all complaint and self-pity was a tonic from which my memory still draws nourishment. It is of him that I think when I hear Balaam's words: "Let me die the death of the righteous, and may my end be like theirs!" (Numbers 23:10 NIV). I saw in him the power of joy, and it was a revelation. Now I celebrate the power of joy as part of the Gospel. Beethoven wrote on the score of his Missa Solemnis, "From the heart; may it in turn go to the heart." I could have put the same words at the beginning of this chapter. God grant that my readers will get the message. I close with two Scriptures for you all who have followed me thus far:

> "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Romans 15:13 NIV).
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> "To Him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before His glorious presence without fault and with great joy—to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and for evermore! Amen" (Jude 24-25 NIV).

JI Packer