

Philippians

Part 19 – Living in Light of the Nearness of God

Philippians 4:4-7

Main Idea: Christians are equipped to rejoice in all circumstances as they live in light of God's nearness through Jesus Christ.

Vs. 4 – This verse contains two of seven imperatives found in verses 4-9 and they are both to rejoice. Paul repeats himself no doubt because given his circumstances and those of the Philippian Christians a call to rejoice could seem incongruous. Christian joy is rooted “in the Lord” rather than dependent upon favorable circumstances. In this way joy can exist side-by-side in the Christian's heart with grief. It can exist simultaneously with trials and hardships.

Vs. 5 – “Gentleness” is a better rendering of the Greek *epieikes*. It means something along the lines of not insisting on taking advantage of every right. It is a requirement of overseers who must be “gentle” (1 Tim 3:3). It is not entirely clear in what sense Paul means in “The Lord is near.” Suggestions range from the Lord in His incarnation to His presence through the Holy Spirit to His immanent return.

Vs. 6 – The anxiety that Paul is commanding us to lay aside is that fear which results from a forgetfulness of God. There is a proper kind of anxiety, the worry that comes from love and an appropriate concern for others. There is also that anxiety which is the result of trauma or physiological problems. The proof of that is that the same word “anxiety” here in 4:6 is used in 2:20 to describe Timothy's concern for the Philippians' welfare. We also know that Paul experienced the anxiety of trauma (2 Cor 2:13).

Paul offers the regular practice of thankful prayer (including bold petitions) as the way to answer back against anxiety. This response of prayer is “in everything.” There are no circumstances that are not the appropriate context for prayer.

Vs. 7 – The result of their heeding Paul's exhortation is that God's peace will keep them, whether or not their specific petition is granted. Clearly this is finishing the thought and provides the corrective to “Do not be anxious...” God's peace will fill their hearts as they live their lives thanking him and looking to him for what they need. “God himself is not beset with anxieties” [F.W. Beare in O'Brien, 496] and those who have his peace won't be either. This peace is something no one will understand who imagines that it is the result of some human calculation. There is something ineffable, God-like about it, more wonderful than you can know until you have experienced it.

1. Reasons to Worry

- Both Paul and the Philippian believers were increasingly hard pressed by circumstances. Paul was writing from prison and the Christians in Philippi were experiencing increasing pressure from without and struggling with challenges from within. Nero was on the throne and his persecution of Christians would only increase. Paul's imprisonment presented a spiritual and emotional hardship for the church. In addition, the Philippian church was one of the Macedonian churches afflicted by “extreme poverty” (2 Cor 8:2).

2. The Fulcrum of Peace

Vs. 5b – “The Lord is at hand.”

- A fulcrum is an object which provides support or leverage to bear necessary weight. It serves as a hinge or support. The promise of the Lord's nearness (his incarnation, ongoing presence, and sure return) act as a sort of fulcrum or leverage for the Christian's experience of the peace of God. “The Lord is at hand” is the clause that immediately precedes the command “do not be anxious about anything” (It is an unfortunate division between verses 5 and 6).

3. Fighting for Peace

Vs. 6 – “...do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.”

- Paul offers a series of directions which can properly be understood as connecting directly to the Christian's experience of peace.

a) Focus on the nature of God.

- Lying at the foundation of all Paul's instructions is a recurring focus on God Himself. Notice how persistent are Paul's references to God who has saved us through Jesus Christ: "Rejoice *in the Lord*" (4:4). "*The Lord* is near" (4:5). "Let your requests be made known *to God*" (4:6). "The peace of *God*...will guard your hearts and minds *in Christ Jesus*" (4:7).
- This repeated focus on God is not incidental to what Paul believes about peace. A focus on who God is and what he has done is absolutely necessary to the Christian's experience of peace.

b) Choose Joy.

Vs. 4 – "Rejoice in the Lord always; I will say it again, rejoice."

- The quick repetition is awkward unless Paul anticipated the possibility of objection. He is well aware of how such a call may sound in the ears of those who are suffering.
- The call to rejoice has two features:
 1. **Christian rejoicing is comprehensive.** It is called for at all times. The Bible is honest about the hardships of life in a fallen world. There are also hardships which are particular to the Christian life. Much of the Bible was written by suffering men to suffering people. So Christian rejoicing is something which can exist alongside grief and pain.
 2. **Christian rejoicing is "in the Lord."** It is not grounded in pleasant circumstances but in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

c) Treat others with gentleness.

Vs. 5 – "Let your reasonableness be known to everyone."

- "Gentleness" or "forbearing spirit" are to be preferred to "reasonableness." The word Paul uses typically refers to a willingness to lay aside one's rights for the sake of another. Christian rejoicing is not grounded in self-seeking but in laboring for the good of others.

d) Be frequent in prayer.

Vs. 6 – This verse includes both a prohibition and an imperative – "Don't be anxious but pray."

- Three Species of Anxiety
 1. An honorable burden to be carried (2 Cor 11:28; Phil 2:20)
 2. A medical condition for which to seek proper treatment (2 Cor 2:13)
 3. A sin of which to repent (Matt 6:25-34; Phil 4:6).
- Prayer is one of the ways we answer back to our anxiety.

4. God's Garrison of Peace

Vs. 7 – "And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

- Peace, here, does not refer to a mellow state of mind. The peace of God is the reconciliation He accomplished with sinners through the dying and rising of Jesus (Rom 5:1). Because of what Jesus has done there is nothing that can now separate us from His love (Rom 8:35-39). That objective peace will "guard your hearts and minds" through the continuing presence of the risen Christ. This peace "passes all understanding" because it has the power to comfort us in the midst of the worst circumstances. Everyday our hearts and minds are under attack and in need of God's protection. He has set a garrison of protection around our hearts and minds through the finished work of Jesus.