

Unity, Joy, and Peace Philippians 4:1-7 (ESV) bible-sermons.org September 4, 2011

This week we are returning to our study in Philippians. I have heard of several other fellowships just concluded their study in Philippians as well. We shouldn't be surprised that God has us on the same page as we are the body of Christ. Many of us are in need of the same instruction at a particular point in time. We should see how the passage applies to us as the church at large, to our particular fellowship, and to us individually.

The closing chapter begins with a transitional verse. It is a concluding passage for the previous thought about being citizens of heaven and having our eye on the prize of the upward call, as we forget what is behind and strain forward to the finish line.

¹Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.

We see that concern and love Paul had for this church. (1:7-8) He called them his joy and his crown. He knew that they were the fruit of his ministry and would carry on when he went home to be with the Lord. They are the one thing he will have in heaven with him, the wonderful relationship of brothers and sisters in Christ and the joys in Christ that we share with one another.

He is telling them to follow his example and stand firm in the Lord to the end. **Continue to seek a greater revelation of the surpassing worth of Christ.** He ends the verse by repeating the term, beloved (*agapetoi*). All these endearing terms show us the love of Christ for this family of believers was very real in Paul's heart. (John 13:34-35)

Now we come to one of the main purpose for which he wrote this letter. ² *I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord.* Apparently there were two women in the fellowship that were at odds with one another. We don't know what their issue was. It probably wasn't that important. More than likely it started over something small, and then escalated. I've seen it happen numerous times. It's often over an issue that is very dear to someone, but not so important to someone else. They voice their differences, but then it begins to become personal. (Proverbs 10:12) They start to criticize one another for other things. They start telling their side of the story to others to "have them pray for the other person". It's only out of loving concern, of course. Then others begin to join one side or the other and before you know it there are two factions in the church. And in the terms of the body of Christ, the nose revolts against the eye. (1Corinthians 12:16-17)

This makes the body unable to function properly. It becomes handicapped. Either the issue is ignored and resentment sets in, or there is continual conflict until there is forgiveness and a restoration of brotherly love. (Proverbs 17:9)

Commented [Paul1]: Philippians 1:7-8 (NIV)

⁷ It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart; for whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me.
⁸ God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.

Commented [Paul2]: John 13:34-35 (NIV)

³⁴ "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.
³⁵ By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

Commented [Paul3]: Proverbs 10:12 (ESV)

¹² Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all offenses.

Commented [Paul4]: 1 Corinthians 12:16-17 (ESV)

¹⁶ And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body.

¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell?

Commented [Paul5]: Proverbs 17:9 (ESV)

⁹ Whoever covers an offense seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates close friends.

Paul appeals to each of these two sisters to agree in the Lord. He has told the church that to be worthy of the Lord they should be of one spirit and one mind. (1:27) He also told them it would fulfill his joy if they would be of the same mind and in full accord. (2:2) If our love for one another is one of the main witnesses that we belong to Christ, the lack of that love severely handicaps our witness.

It seems to me that all through this letter, this conflict has been a factor behind much of what Paul has written. He's told them to think more highly of others than you do of yourself. (2:3) He's given us Christ's example of humble obedience. He's warned not to grumble or complain (2:14), and to forget what is behind and press forward to the upward call of God in Christ. (3:13)

This is a great letter for personality clashes within the church. It is full of good, sound, practical advice to check oneself to see if we are walking in the Spirit and following Jesus' example or living in our flesh.

I don't believe the single-mindedness that Paul is asking means to completely agree on the issue at hand. As we read in the previous passage, sometimes we allow the differences of opinion, trusting that God will show the one who is in error. (3:15) Our single-mindedness and agreement is that Jesus is everything! He's the One we live for and serve daily. He is the One we passionately love. Our unity is in who He is and what He has done for us. These sisters need to get their focus on Christ. What they need to agree on is that it is all about Jesus. In Him, we love and serve one another. (Galatians 5:13)

³ Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life. This verse has been a challenge for translators. It is impossible to tell if Paul is writing to a loyal person named Sysygos or to an individual he referred to as loyal yoke-fellow. We do know the one he's asking for help is one man (singular masculine). Paul and company were assisted by these two women, Euodia and Syntyche. They labored along with Paul's team for the advancement of the gospel. But now they are at odds over something. So Paul asks either the loyal elder Sysygos or someone he called "loyal yokefellow" to help them get over it. (James 5:19-20)

We know some have been blessed with the ability to help others resolve conflict. It is good to seek them out. We have some among us with that gift. The wrong third party can actually make things worse. The mediator should be completely neutral as they come to hear about the issue at hand but with heart for the Lord first and foremost and grounded in God's word. If you really want the Lord's will in a matter, seek those that have that gift. Those who would bring in someone that is already on their side as a

Commented [Paul6]: Philippians 1:27 (ESV)

²⁷ Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel.

Commented [Paul7]: Philippians 2:2 (ESV)

² complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.

Commented [Paul8]: Philippians 2:3 (ESV)

³ Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

Commented [Paul9]: Philippians 2:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ Do all things without grumbling or questioning,

Commented [Paul10]: Philippians 3:13 (ESV)

¹³ Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead.

Commented [Paul11]: Philippians 3:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you.

Commented [Paul12]: Galatians 5:13 (ESV)

¹³ For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.

Commented [Paul13]: James 5:19-20 (ESV)

¹⁹ My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back,
²⁰ let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

third party, or that already has a bias, are really not seeking resolution but victory for themselves. A Sysygos is an asset to any church and should be a valued part of the body of Christ. (Matthew 5:9)

Commented [Paul14]: Matthew 5:9 (ESV)
⁹“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

⁴ *Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.* Paul reiterates his command to rejoice! (2:18) I don't think it is coincidental that he repeats the command after exhorting these two women to focus on Jesus. If you are filled with joy over the same thing about which someone else is filled with joy, you have an instant bond that overcomes differences, the joy bond.

Commented [Paul15]: Philippians 2:18 (ESV)
¹⁸Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me.

I'm always amazed at the joy of those who suffer for their faith. (2Corinthians 6:10) I find an instant connection with them. They love the One I love! Their hearts are thrilled with the same One that thrills my heart. To rejoice in the same One is unity! (John 17:20-21)

Commented [Paul16]: 2 Corinthians 6:10 (ESV)
¹⁰as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything.

Rejoicing in the Lord, as we often do in song, fills the heart and helps us focus on what really matters. Our differences melt away as we are caught up in the wonder of who Jesus is. It is a taste of heaven where we'll join with those Seraphim rejoicing in the holiness of our awesome God. (Isaiah 6:3)

Commented [Paul17]: John 17:20-21 (ESV)
²⁰“I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word,
²¹that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

So shouldn't we do it all the time? The verse does say “always”, does it not? What a difference in our work day, in our conversations, in our home life, in our leisure if we are found rejoicing in the Lord! Can you think of any reason we should stop rejoicing in the Lord? And how attractive would that make Jesus to the world?

Commented [Paul18]: Isaiah 6:3 (ESV)
³And one called to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!”

⁵ *Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand;* Whatever the difference was, reasonableness was probably the answer. It is often the answer to disputes. We should always seek the Lord's heart, and His answer is always reasonable. It may seem unreasonable to the unreasonable, but to those with the mind of Christ (1Corinthians 2:16), it will always be reasonable. The body of Christ should not seem unreasonable to the world. Our testimony should be of doing our best to be at peace with a generous spirit. The word can also be translated “gentle”, as in “let your gentleness be known to everyone”, and is applied to our Lord. (2Corinthians 10:1)

Commented [Paul19]: 1 Corinthians 2:16 (ESV)
¹⁶“For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.

“The Lord is at hand” may have been somewhat of a warning. Jesus could appear at any moment. The Lord is at hand, literally means He is near. (James 5:8) He is the silent observer of our actions and attitudes. And yes, before we know it, the trumpet will sound. Will he be pleased with your attitude toward your brothers and sisters?

Commented [Paul20]: 2 Corinthians 10:1 (ESV)
¹ I, Paul, myself entreat you, by the meekness and gentleness of Christ—I who am humble when face to face with you, but bold toward you when I am away!

Commented [Paul21]: James 5:8 (ESV)
⁸ You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.

The Apostle wrote this almost 2000 years ago, but whether Jesus comes in the clouds in our lifetime, or we die of natural causes, this life is a vapor that disappears in a

moment. (James 4:14) Then we will forever be with the Lord. Are we living for that day? Are we investing in eternity? Paul had just declared that he was. He was waiting for the transformation of his body. He was pressing toward the upward call. What are the little differences we experience in the light of that soon coming event? The Lord is always near! Are we living as if He is standing beside us?

6 do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. In the light of the brevity of life, and the faithfulness of God, there is no need to be anxious about anything. (Matthew 6:25, 31, 34) You can't be filled with anxiety and rejoicing at the same time. **You have to release your anxiety to truly rejoice.** In fact, the opportunity to release our anxiety is one of the reasons we rejoice. God is fully capable of dealing with our problems. He has planned our days. (Psalm 139:16) So when anxiety is felt in our heart and mind, we know what to do. We take it to the Lord in prayer.

I wonder if this verse was the inspiration for the song, *What A Friend We Have in Jesus?* The last verse of that song may not be familiar to you.

Blessed Savior, Thou hast promised
Thou wilt all our burdens bear;
May we ever, Lord, be bringing
All to Thee in earnest prayer.
Soon in glory bright, unclouded,
There will be no need for prayer—
Rapture, praise, and endless worship
Will be our sweet portion there.

When our burdens are unloaded on those greatest of all shoulders, those of our Lord, then we have a reason to rejoice. Things may not go as we desire, but they will be for the best. Those in love with Jesus can rest assured of that. (Romans 8:28) Our undistracted rejoicing unites our hearts. This was Paul's longing for the church at Philippi and the church at large.

We think of this passage applying personally and that is where we should start. We should never be that sour puss, long in the face, down in the mouth so called Christian. We should ever be those glowing, rejoicing, believers with a positive outlook and hope in our Savior for today and all eternity. We take our anxieties and burdens to the throne of God with thankful hearts and are assured that they are in the most capable and loving hands. (Hebrews 4:16)

Can we apply this verse as a church body of believers? I don't see why not. If we have concerns as a church body, we take them to God in prayer. We are a house of prayer.

Commented [Paul22]: James 4:14 (ESV)
¹⁴yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.

Commented [Paul23]: Matthew 6:25 (ESV)
²⁵Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?

Commented [Paul24]: Matthew 6:31 (ESV)
³¹Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'

Commented [Paul25]: Matthew 6:34 (ESV)
³⁴Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

Commented [Paul26]: Psalm 139:16 (ESV)
¹⁶Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.

Commented [Paul27]: Romans 8:28 (ESV)
²⁸And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

Commented [Paul28]: Hebrews 4:16 (ESV)
¹⁶Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

(Isaiah 56:7) This year we've been asking for us as a church to be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. We ask to be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father... Colossians 1:9-12a (ESV)

We are even invited as a nation to take our requests to the Lord. (Isaiah 65:1) With humility and repentance we lift our nation up as a concern of our heart to the Lord.

And the results of this continual casting of our burdens and anxieties upon the Lord is the following verse. *⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.* Our dependency upon God brings us the peace of God. It is not peace like the world experiences, a peace that is absent of conflict. It is much greater than that. It is the peace that can remain through any storm, even in the middle of it. It is God's own peace. (John 14:27)

God inhabits the Eternal Now, present in every moment of time, involved in it all at once. He knows the future like it was the past. He's always experiencing it. If He says it will be then you can be certain that it will be. Talk about surpassing our understanding, it puts me in awe to just talk about it.

This peace is the very presence of the Lord in our life assuring us that He has it all under control. It will all turn out to be a blessing in the end. We can't see how. We don't need to. All we need to know is that it's in His hands and those hands are all-powerful. (Daniel 4:35)

That is the peace that will keep, or guard, our minds. You see, it is the turmoil of the mind that pulls us out of that peace. We start to imagine scenarios. We entertain fear. We dwell on past conflicts. All of these are dealt with when we take it to the Lord in prayer. The peace that God gives guards our mind from the turmoil that keeps us from rejoicing. (Acts 16:25)

We started this morning with unity. We moved to the topic of rejoicing, and have concluded with the peace that comes when we take our anxiety to the Lord in prayer. They are completely interconnected with the situation that was happening with the Philippian church. They needed to rejoice in the Lord to get focused on the eternal. They then needed to cast on the Lord the concern for the differences that sprang up. (1Peter 5:7) With the joy of the Lord in their hearts and His peace in their minds, there is bound to be unity, one Spirit, and one mind.

Commented [Paul29]: Isaiah 56:7 (ESV)

⁷ these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.

Commented [Paul30]: Colossians 1:9-12 (ESV)

⁹ And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,

¹⁰ so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.

¹¹ May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy,

¹² giving thanks to the Father

Commented [Paul31]: Isaiah 65:1 (ESV)

¹ I was ready to be sought by those who did not ask for me; I was ready to be found by those who did not seek me. I said, "Here am I, here am I, to a nation that was not called by my name.

Commented [Paul32]: John 14:27 (ESV)

²⁷ Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.

Commented [Paul33]: Daniel 4:35 (NIV)

³⁵ All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: "What have you done?"

Commented [Paul34]: Acts 16:25 (ESV)

²⁵ About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them,

Commented [Paul35]: 1 Peter 5:7 (NIV)

⁷ Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

This is the true unity God desires for the church. Not that we all are forced to think the same. We don't need to be brainwashed. We need the mind of Christ. We need to see things as they really are. We need to focus on the One that matters, our Savior. Rejoicing in the Lord and prayer that brings the peace of God is the path to that unity that overrides minor differences that so often plague the church.

May we as individuals and as a church live out this passage in the years to come. May we be known as the joyful church because we are always rejoicing in the Lord, and because Jesus has become our sole focus. May we be the ones that have a peace that comes from continually letting our requests be known to God in prayer, experiencing His own divine peace. And may our joy and peace result in a holy unity that attracts others to our Lord and Savior Jesus!

Questions

- 1 What do you get to take to heaven?
- 2 How do factions form in church?
- 3 What does "agree in the Lord" mean?
- 4 What does this say about a woman's role in the church?
- 5 What gift is needed in times of conflict?
- 6 Why do we rejoice? How does this bring unity?
- 7 Why shouldn't we be anxious about anything?
- 8 What do we do with anxiety?
- 9 What is the result?
- 10 How does peace guard our mind?