

"Rejoice in the Lord always, again I say rejoice."
Philippians 4:4

Intro:

We are coming to the end of a great book. Some of the greatest verses in the NT come from this book (See **1:6; 21; 2:3-7; 3:81-4; 4:3-8; 11-13** to name a few). Paul has clearly showed us how to rejoice in the fellowship of the gospel, which we are called to since Christ has paid the penalty on the cross for our sake. He has given us examples of Jesus first then Timothy and Epaphroditus, and then himself. He has lovingly pleaded with the Philippian church to turn their concerns to Christ and His mission, and stop the divisiveness, and legalism that hurts the gospel. In our passage today, Paul makes his most pragmatic plea to live in such a way that glorifies God, and brings forth the peace of God that we desire in this life. Hope you listen and stumble through with me some vary hard things to hear.

From the Head...

Steps to the Peace of God

Many years ago Billy Graham wrote an evangelistic tract called "*Steps to Peace With God*" which outlined what he believed was the foundation of the gospel. In our passage today Paul gives as an outline to find the Peace of God in our lives (See **Philippians 4:9**). Philippians has been a book about the "*Fellowship of Joy*" found in a relationship with Christ, and His mission in the world. Paul's joy is not a fanciful joy separate from real world living. So many struggling people eschew help because those that want to help simply "*Don't understand!*" Or, "*No one feels my pain.*" This can't be said of Paul and the Philippians. Paul was in prison, facing imminent death. The Philippians faced relational division, heresy, ostracism, persecution, poverty and possibly even death. In spite of this Paul urged the church to find their way to God's peace, "*Which surpasses all understanding!*" In our passage, we see six imperatives to the path of the peace of God:

1. Help One Another Mend Relational Differences (Philippians 4:2-3)

Here we see the reality of the messiness of doing life together. Paul's advice is not to have one leave the church because there is a problem. These women were warriors of the gospel, and were good people, but like all of us, their identity wasn't fully in Christ, which always causes divisive relationships. The reason division happens (Unless it is heresy, which doesn't appear to be the problem in this circumstance) is because we simply have to be right, and we are forced to defend our rights. In this passage Paul urges another gospel warrior to step into the fray, and "Help" these two women come to an agreement "*In the Lord.*" There has been too much ink spilled over the use of the Greek word "*suzuge*," which means "yoke-fellow/comrade." There are some who think that it's actually a proper name (Syzogus), but there is not enough information to go with that interpretation, or to figure out who this "Comrade" might be (Speculation is Luke, Timothy and Epaphroditus as the front runners). The fact is, we are called to intervene in our gospel communities to help one another work through the relational problems in the group, properly applying the gospel (Grace, mercy, repentance, forgiveness, redemption) to every area of our lives. This is a gospel ordeal. Jesus clearly said in **Matthew 5:23-24** that if you have anything between you and a brother, leave the altar, and go to that brother and reconcile with them. Instead we leave the church or stew in bitterness, because church has become a place we go to, and not a body that we gospel with. We are called to be peace-makers (**Matthew 5:9**) and to live in harmony/agreement with one another. The word used for "Agreement" (*φρονεῖν*) means to think alike. The key here is the phrase "*In the Lord.*" This thinking needs to look like **Philippians 2:3-7**, which is the way Christ thought toward us.

2. Find Your Joy In the Lord (Philippians 4:4)

As theologian Karl Barth wrote, "*That Joy in Philippians is a defiant 'Nevertheless!'*" The idea of rejoicing (Which has been used to mark off sections in this book) has come in the context of personal turmoil (**Philippians 2:18; 3:1**, and here in **4:4**). As one commentator says, "*Rejoice certainly does defy the thankless, complaining nature of humanity and human custom throughout history.*" Rejoicing in Christ is rooted in salvation, and not circumstantial blessing. This is not a trumped up, plastic smile rejoicing, but a real joy in the midst of human pain. The joy that comes from a hope that is outside of our control. It's a joy in spite of... It's a joy that allows you to work through human relational problems, because this kind of joy releases you from the need to be right. This rejoicing is done "Always," not circumstantially. If you are trying to find joy outside of Jesus, you will always be joyless, and you will continually be chasing harmful relationships and lifestyles in order to fill your giant void in your life. We are created to find our happiness in the Lord. **Nehemiah 8:10** reminds us that, "*The joy of the Lord is your strength.*" To this US Senate Chaplain Loyd Ogilvie adds, "*Rejoicing in the Lord is not a luxury, it's a necessity!*" In the midst of our pain, we cry out defiantly and embrace a "Nevertheless" mentality, "*Rejoice in the Lord always, again I say rejoice!*"

3. Be Gentle To Everyone (Philippians 4:5)

Another component to the peace of God is gentleness (The ESV renders ἐπιεικὲς “*reasonableness*,” but it is better to understand it as “*gentleness*”). How are we speaking and acting to those in the faith and those outside the faith? A true sign of those that have a rejoicing heart is gentleness, because they are rejoicing over the tender mercy by which God has dealt with them. When our identity is in Christ, we can take the abuse that life tends to give out. The phrase “*The Lord is at hand*” reminds us that Christ is both near to us in proximity, and near to us in His return, which is a constant reminder that He will re-right all the injustice in this world, allowing us to trust in Him, and place our fears and desires under submission to Him; the only one that can do anything about them anyway.

4. Do Not Be Anxious About Your Life (Philippians 4:6-7)

I think two things are true here. One, we all worry, and secondly, worrying is a true sign that we are rusting other things to please us. Jesus said the same in **Matthew 6:25-34**. Here we are told that we are far more valued than the birds of the field who God takes care of (**v.26**), and that worry is basically pagan (**v.32**). Pagan gods are there to be used to get something, they are not there to save, show mercy, forgive sins, etc. If we see God as a means to an end, it will always be hard to rejoice and not worry, because we will always see incidences when He “Doesn’t come through.” It is not an issue as to whether or not stress and anxiety will come upon us, but the question is what will you do with it? Paul prescribes two things: **The first** is “*Prayer and supplication.*” The Psalms are full of prayers to help with anxiety and fears. These aren’t prayers of the moment, but a prayerful life that has a pattern of taking things to God. The **second** prescription is equally important; “*With thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.*” Thanksgiving is, as one commentator notes “*The posture of grace.*” Unbelief is devoid of thankfulness (**Romans 1:21; 2 Timothy 3:2**). Are we taking our anxiety to God in thankful, prayer first, or some other path of release?

5. Think About Praise-Worthy Things (Philippians 4:8)

It is important to fill your head with “Praise-Worthy” things. It is good to enjoy those things as God has blessed us with them; but it is also important to realize that Christ is the most praise-worthy object. What are we filling our head with? Christ, and His cross, or the latest blockbuster film, preaching its gospel in high definition? Is the culture shaping you, or are you being shaped by the gospel of Jesus Christ? Are your opinions formed by a healthy dose of theology, or do Oprah and CNN form it? This does not mean that we shouldn’t watch blockbuster films, Oprah or CNN, but it does mean that if you do that at the exclusion of thinking on Christ as the only true, honorable right, pure, lovely, of good repute, and individual worthy of praise, then I can guarantee you will be shaped by the culture, and the peace of God will allude your grasp. The issue is not what “Kind” of movie you watch, but it is whether or not Christ is forming your view of that movie.

6. Practice the Presence of God (Philippians 4:9)

None of these things mean anything if you leave here today wondering what you are going to do for lunch as your number one concern for the day. If we do not practice what Paul through the Holy Spirit drenched inspiration of scripture has to say to us, the peace of God will always be a dream of some “Super Christians,” but not anything that I can get a handle on. “That kind of peace is for Paul, and missionaries, but not for me.” Those words are no different from Billy Corrigan’s “*He (Jesus) may be the savior for some, but not for me.*” It’s a form of practical atheism, to live in such a way as not to believe. Has God shown you mercy and grace? How will that matter in your life? How will that matter in your disputes, your prayer life, dealing with pain and anxiety?

...to the Heart

We all, myself included, live our lives in a practical defiance of the commands of the Lord, and then wonder why our lives are such a mess. We go to many counselors, none of which open the word and give us counsel from the “Mighty Counselor,” and we still struggle with every day issues. We fail to accept God’s love and forgiveness, and His grace in our lives, and subsequently we fail to live as thankful, grace giving people. We can’t cut anyone any slack, because we believe no one has cut us any slack. Maybe it’s time to stop thinking that relief comes from human wisdom, and can only come a robust theology that helps us understand a graceful God can bring a joy and a peace that we all long for, even in the midst of circumstantial pain.

Books for Further Study: *Word Biblical Studies; Philippians, Gerald Hawthorne; The NIV Application Commentary; Philippians, Frank Thielman; The New International Greek Testament Commentary; Philippians, Peter T. O’Brien; Preaching the Word; Philippians, R. Kent Hughes; Paul’s Letter to the Philippians; Gordon D. Fee*

To interact with the sermon online, go to www.sermonrant.wordpress.com