

"Prioritizing Peace" Philippians 4:1-9
Wednesday 4/17/19 - Jeff Lyle

Most of the world thinks of peace as the absence of conflict. Beyond that, many of those same people assume that peace is unattainable unless that absence of conflict is their current reality. Wouldn't it be terrible if that were true? That would mean that would be zero possibility of peace unless everything in our lives was pleasant, friction-free and easy on our souls. In this message, we will learn that peace is something that is to be prized, and especially when it is attained in the midst of real-life struggles. Because we live in a world conditioned by sin and brokenness, we will only experience spiritual peace to the degree that prioritize and pursue it. The Apostle Paul teaches us how to do exactly that as he instructs the Philippian believers to fight for peace in their human relationships, their relationship with God and their own minds.

I. Working at Relational Peace (1-3)

A. Something to remember together (1) - "Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved."

Paul reminds us that Christians are spiritual siblings, called unto family love in Jesus. We are brothers and sisters in the Spirit who have the same Father. We are beloved by God and, therefore, called unto deep love with one another. Paul calls the people to partner with one another as they continue to press toward the prize of their shared calling as believers. The arena in which they are to stand firm together is in their relationship in the Lord. Christians will always possess differing views in numerous areas in life. Our unity is never to be in those lesser loyalties. Our eternal unity is found in our shared relationship with Jesus Christ. This is to be prioritized as the place of our current unity together on earth. We must remember this.

B. Something to pursue together (2) - "I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord."

Paul does something that is a little risky. He mentions two women in the church at Philippi to come together in agreement. We are given no details but, apparently, the division between these two women was serious enough for the Apostle to mention them by name in a letter that would be publicly read to the church. He wants these women to humbly set aside the differences in their relationship and work out together their oneness in Jesus. If Paul were writing this letter today, is there someone he could name alongside of you that would require an exhortation for you both to put aside your differences? The Lord is not content for us to merely ignore or avoid

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one another when we are at odds. We are to honor Him by working out our issues until we can move together in unity.

C. Something to guard together (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."

Sometimes, two people in the Church are unable to resolve their differences on their own. In these instances, other believers are called to come alongside them to provide assistance in working out the difficulties so that relational peace can be regained. We all should be committed to becoming agents of reconciliation wherever division appears in the Body of Christ. Paul subtly reminds his readers that our names are side by side in the book of life in Heaven; how then can we remain at odds with one another while on earth?

II. Prioritizing Emotional Peace (5-7)

A. Treasure joy in your soul (4) - "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice."

Interestingly, Paul moves into a twice-repeated call for us to rejoice in the Lord. Yes, joy is commanded of us. The reason why is because Jesus is worthy of our ongoing joy. He is to remain centermost in our thinking. When we are obsessed with Jesus, our joy will remain full. To the degree that we get distracted by other things and remain that way, our joy will diminish. If I am finding myself without joy on a prolonged basis, it is because my focus is no longer on Jesus. When I am centered in His love for me, His care for my daily needs, His glory, His mission and His promises, it is almost impossible not to experience joy. Yet, life presents us with so many distractions and challenges. This is why we are commanded to rejoice. If we do not take ownership over our hearts and minds, our level of joy will inevitably become attached to our circumstances. When this happens, we only experience a fabricated joy, one that depends on what is going on outside of us. Paul commands us to intentionally anchor our joy in Jesus.

B. Wean yourself from agitation (5) - "Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand."

This is not a stand-alone piece of instruction from Paul. In the context of becoming people of peace, Paul calls believers to live intentionally

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with a mildness, a meekness, a yieldedness. Yes, Paul calls for us to remember that the Lord will return to the planet one day and is currently present in His Church in the person of Holy Spirit. The Savior who was meek and lowly, calls us to operate in the same gentle spirit with others. In fact, Paul says that we should live like this at such a level that everyone views it as one of our personal characteristics. He says it should be known by everyone that we are reasonable people, looking to foster harmony in our relationships. Pursuing peace in our relationships provides for greater likelihood that we ourselves will experience emotional peace within. When we are committed to yielding to Holy Spirit's desire to work His gentleness through us, we will realize that we are also experiencing His gentleness *within* us.

B. Refuse to nurture anxiety (6) - "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God."

These may very well be some of the most challenging instructions Paul writes to believers. Here we have a prohibitive imperative, perhaps more easily known as a "Thou-shalt-not." Paul commands believers to refuse anxiousness to live within us. This seems like a tall order if we divorce it from the context. When we are pursuing unity with one another (verses 1-3), anchoring our joyfulness in the Person of Jesus Christ (verse 4), and living in intentional gentleness in our human relationships (verse 5), we are qualified to live anxiety-free lives. The way that this occurs is that we learn to draw our sense of inner peace solely through our relationship with Jesus. Notice that I say that we learn this. It does not come automatically just because we are Christians. We literally must take ownership of our thoughts and refuse to allow anxiety to drive our thought-lives. The antidote to anxiety and worry is a robust, consistent prayer life. Instead of worrying over anything, we are commanded to pray about everything. We are also commanded to remain intentionally grateful people. Gratitude can help to negate anxiety. Once we release our requests to the God who cares for us, we are able to refuse to remain anxious over it. It is with God now. We leave it there. Over time, we are able to actually defuse our anxiety instinct and live in confidence with Christ.

C. Receive a calmed heart (7) - "And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

The result of submitting everything to God in thankfulness and prayer is that an unexplainable peace will begin to characterize our lives.

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You will find yourself no longer fretful over the very things which once disturbed your sense of peace. You will mature to the point where you can stand atop the very things which used to crush your emotions. This peace will then serve as a protector from future impulses to worry over whatever might come your way next. Clearly, this is a supernatural, spiritual place to arrive. We are told that it passes our ability to intellectually understand it. Others will wonder how you are so calm in the midst of challenging circumstances. Your honest answer will be that God is supplying you a supernatural peace that is guarding your heart and securing your mind.

III. Taking Ownership of Mental Peace (8)

"Think about these things..." - Denotes a constant thought process

A. Focus on that which is biblical - "...whatever is true..."

B. Focus on that which is superior - "...whatever is honorable..."
Reverent, dignified, noble

C. Focus on that which is holy - "...whatever is just...pure...lovely..."

D. Focus on that which is worthy - "...whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise..."

Clearly, achieving inner peace does not happen without our full cooperation. Peace is experienced in the heart, the mind and the soul. The bible does not neatly divide these three aspects of the human experience. What we are able to clearly see is that there is a process whereby external influences impact our internal state. Paul calls us to continually think upon certain types of things. Clearly, the status of our hearts depends upon what we give our thoughts to. We cannot allow inferior things into our minds and reasonably expect to live with peace. Everything we allow into our minds has an impact on our soul. We are either building inward peace or reducing it. Paul calls us to center our own minds on things that are true, honorable, holy and worthy. If we will place this type of superior filter across our minds, our personal peace will grow. If we are negligent in this area, we will allow teachings, ideas, philosophies and entertainment that degrade our peace to gain access to our thoughts. Our minds are designed by God to not normally remain in neutral. You are always thinking about something, even when you are asleep. If we refuse to give our minds to unworthy things, they are unable to influence the condition

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of our hearts. When we treasure our personal peace, we will consecrate the gates of our minds to Christ and only allow those things to enter which are consistent with who He is.

IV. Learning From People of Peace (9)

A. Accept the role of a life-long student - "What you have learned..."

B. Choose your role models wisely - "...received and heard and seen in me..."

C. Live out your beliefs consistently - "...practice these things, and the God peace will be with you."

Paul concludes this section of instruction by pointing us to human examples. Not for the first time, he calls the Christians at Philippi to follow his own example. He literally tells them that, if they will emulate his own approach to living as a Jesus-follower, they will experience the presence of the God of peace. Notice that he calls them to practice these things. The verb tense that Paul uses in the original language indicates that he is calling them (and us) to habitually do these things. Friends, the Apostle is saying that we can experience regular peace, growing peace and contagious peace! We are actually in control of the vast majority of our personal experience of God's peace. If we will protect our minds and give them only to the best things, we will expose ourselves to greater opportunities for peace. If we will prioritize unity with one another, we will experience the peace of God which comes from our abiding unity with Him. If we believe that we are empowered to live free from all anxiety, we will pursue prayer, thankfulness and release to God on a regular basis which will lead us more deeply and consistently into His peace. These are offers from Heaven which come through our personal commitment and cooperation with God. In the end, we realize that God is pouring out His peace and all we must learn to do is align ourselves with how and where He is pouring it.