

Paul's Letter to the Philippians

Session Twelve June 9, 2020

Philippians 4:2-9

Paul appeals to two church members to reconcile over an unknown dispute, while at the same time, reminding the church the importance of unity among the body.

Paul emphasizes the hallmark of the Philippians letter, "Rejoice", while at the same time encouraging the church to be gentle in spirit, prayerful in times of worry, and to thoroughly think through the good in God's creation while following the model that Paul has set.

Opening Question...

(1) What brought you joy this week? Why was this so joyful?

Last week, Paul talked about the importance of following proper Christian models in the pursuit of Christian discipleship. He set himself as a positive model, while showing how other models from the world may be tempting yet would fall flat. Paul also warned the church about the lure of falling in the pattern of following lifestyles that once seemed normal to them. He challenged the Philippians to look at the world with a fresh set of eyes – a new perspective! Paul also reminds the church that heavenly citizenship starts now, through transformation on earth by Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, living as servants in this world.

This week in Philippians 4:2-9, Paul addresses a specific dispute taking place between two women in the Philippian church. While we do not know the specifics, Paul emphasizes the greater unity for the church and the Christian community. Paul then touches on the hallmark emotion for the Philippian letter, JOY! He encourages the church to rejoice and let it be visible in the community. However, at the same time, Paul encourages these early Christians to be gentle in spirit as a good witness. Paul then addresses the importance of prayer in relationship to worry. He concludes this section by challenging the church to think through the goodness of God in Creation outside the church.

4:2-3 – Reconciliation Needed...

Earlier in the Philippians letter, Paul discussed the importance of unity in the Spirit. He may have been setting the tone in addressing a

specific problem that was taking place between two women in the Philippians church. Euodia and Syntyche have had some type of falling out that needs to be resolved. This is another example where we wish we had the footnote to the situation, but unfortunately, we do not have the details. Theology? Incident? Personal? All we know is that these two women served as faithful servants to the gospel beside Paul while he was there and are no longer getting along, and they need to. Paul, being aware of the situation, encourages a “true companion” to help them reconcile.

Again, who is this “true companion”? Some have even speculated that this could be Paul’s wife. However, there is no scriptural evidence anywhere else that Paul was even married! Many scholars have leaned towards Epaphroditus as the person that Paul is encouraging to step in and help. If this is the case, wouldn’t he have told him in person, since he was delivering the letter...Paul also mentions the name of Clement and rest of my fellow workers as individuals who he worked beside and whose names are included in the book of life. We are not sure what exactly this “book of life” is, but many believe he is using a loose reference to those faithful followers of Christ. The Philippian community would understand this reference to a “registered book” since they were Roman citizens and their names were included in a citizens’ registry. Paul’s overall message to these two women (and to the church) is to find unity! (2 Corinthians 5 and Philemon are good follow up readings!)

4:4 – Rejoice, Rejoice...

Philippians 4:4 is probably the most well known and most all-encompassing letter describing verse found in this writing of Paul. From the prison cell, Paul is encouraging the Philippians church to REJOICE. But why? Paul wants the Philippians to celebrate joy! He wants the city of Philippi to hear the church’s joy! Can you hear joy? We can usually feel joy. We can usually see joy. However, we do not often times think about hearing joy. In the Old Testament books of Ezra and Nehemiah, as the Jewish people were returning to Jerusalem to rebuild the city and the Temple, Nehemiah states that the joy of Jerusalem could be heard far away! This is what Paul was emphasizing to the Philippians as they were interacting in their community. May your joy not just be seen, but also be heard. (As a side note, think about Sunday’s sermon about how we express ourselves in worship!)

4:5 – May Your Gentleness be attractive...

While Paul was emphasizing the importance of having one's joy being heard and evident, he recognized the ability of this outward expression to be a "turn off" to the outside world. Paul emphasized that the return of Jesus is near (we do not know the time and place), and he did not want the actions of the Christian community to come off as disingenuous. One's faith or rejoicing should not make others feel down about themselves. Paul recognized that this happened in other pagan festivals, and that this "showmanship" should not be what a Christian rejoicing should be. May a Christian's gentleness be the attracting agent to others in the community. The combination of joy and gentleness was an important combination. Joy cannot be manufactured. It is genuine.

4:6-7 – How to Handle the Anxiety Cycle...

Paul was no stranger to anxiety and worry. (Read 2 Corinthians and you can notice some of these stresses.) Paul recognized that there would be times of anxiety and worry for the Philippians as well. The ultimate goal is to have no worry at all. However, when we do, how do we handle it? Paul was sharing with the church his approach to anxiety and it all centers around the practice of prayer. THE REGULAR DISCIPLINE OF PRAYER IS NEEDED TO HANDLE ANXIETY AND WORRY. Unfortunately, the world (even the Christian world) discourages people from honestly talking and sharing about anxiety. Instead, we are told to hide it. Paul, instead, is saying to share it with God. Pray about it. Share it with the One who is always there. Let God know what we need or want through prayer. Give thanks for the provisions that He has provided for you – for getting you through the difficult times. Give thanks for what He is going to do in the future – getting you through the anxiety you are experiencing now.

Ultimately, God's peace will provide for you everything that you will need. His peace will guard your heart and mind, in the good times and the bad. Paul is reminding the Philippians that it does not mean it will not come back, but if it does, He will be right there waiting for you. His peace will be there too. Remember, Jesus Christ while on earth kept saying, "Peace be with you!" Shalom! (We see these same things echoed in 1 Peter 5.)

4:8 – Keep Thinking Through...

Just like last week, Paul encouraged the Philippians to keep thinking about their faith. (Philippians 3:18-19) He was challenging the church to start looking at the world in a new way. In verse eight, Paul identifies what is true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, good repute, excellence, or worthy of praise, and encourages the church to think about these things. At first look, we might assume Paul is talking about what is inside the Philippians church, the koinonia. However, Paul is actually challenging the church to look outside the walls for a minute. Paul is what N.T. Wright likes to describe as a “Creational Theologist”, one who believes in the goodness of God’s Creation, and that God is recreating the world because, though the world is spoiled, He has not given up on it. Outside the church walls, there are things that reflect the greatness of the Creator God! Not everything outside the church’s walls are “doom and gloom”! Paul is encouraging the Philippians to think about their faith and to think positively as they look for God’s fingerprints throughout His creation.

4:9 – Learn and Do, But Remember Your Model...

Paul wrapped up this section and he is slowly wrapping up his letter by encouraging the Philippians to learn from these life lessons. As these lessons are learned from their observations, apply them and practice them in their faith walk. However, Paul reminded them to not model their faith from the “outside sources” (we learned that last week), but to follow his model as they grew in their faith. Do not take your orders from the world. Learn from the world. May your faith and joy shine in the world.

Paul encouraged reconciliation between Euodia and Syntyche for the good of the Philippian community, while emphasizing the importance of unity for all Christians.

Paul highlighted themes of joy, gentleness, prayer in anxiety, and faith thinking about God’s Creation to assist the Philippians to strengthen their individual and community faith journeys.

Follow Up Questions...

Throughout this epistle, we see Paul leveraging his influence for the sake of unity. How can you leverage your own influence to bring greater unity to the people in your world?

What causes you anxiety and how do you typically respond? How might Paul's instructions change how you handle anxiety?

Christians sometimes are cynical about the presence of virtue outside of the Church. Paul is not. Where do you see signs of God's character at work beyond the Church?

New Online Bible Study starts Wednesday, June 24

A Study of Understanding, Healing, and Hope"

Starting on *June 24*, we will begin a new Bible study that will dive into the theological writings of the Baptist minister Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., from the book "*A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches*". Each week we will discuss one of his writings, speeches, or sermons, and the biblical foundations for understanding, healing, and hope in a divided world.