

Philippians Chapter 4

Stand fast in the Lord (Philippians 4:1-7)

Chapter 4 begins with the Apostle Paul describing the Philippian Christians as "beloved", "longed-for brethren", and "my joy and crown". These terms inform us as to the feelings existing between the Apostle and the Philippian church. There was a tremendous feeling of mutual love and affection between them (Philippians 1:8). Paul urges these Christians whom he loves to "stand fast in the Lord".

This admonition is immediately followed by Paul addressing a situation that threatened the peace and unity of the congregation. In verse 2 Paul names two women from the congregation, Euodia and Syntyche, and implores them to "be of the same mind in the Lord" (Philippians 2:2).

Imagine you are a member of the Lord's church in Philippi on a Sunday morning when it is announced that the church has received a letter from the Apostle Paul. Most of the early Christians were illiterate, and would depend upon someone else to read important documents such as this letter. During the service, one of the Christians who could read would stand and begin to read aloud the words from Paul. As we have seen through this epistle, the words are very encouraging, but imagine your feelings if you heard your name mentioned with the command to patch things up with another member of the church! But, that is exactly what would have happened in Philippi on the day Paul's epistle was read.

The name Euodia means "fine traveling" while the name, Syntyche, means "an accident". Judging from the names of these Christian women we might see a possibility for their falling out. It seems that they had worked together previously in spreading the gospel (see verse 3), but now were estranged from each other. They are commanded by Paul to return to their previous unity.

In verse 3 Paul mentions a "true companion", who is urged to help "these women", perhaps a reference back to Euodia and Syntyche. While we do not know the identity of the "true companion", or Clement (although there was a Bishop of the church in Rome by that name in the First Century who also wrote an early Christian epistle), we can be sure that the Philippian Christians knew the identity of both. Paul also mentions other fellow workers whose names are written in the "Book of Life". This is the same book mentioned so prominently in Revelation and where our names are also written.

In verse 4 Paul is caught up in the joy inherent in the thought of our names being written in the Book of Life. In this verse he urges us to "Rejoice in the Lord always" and repeats it for emphasis. Christians should be the most joyful of all people. We have been saved and our names are written in the Book of Life.

In verse 5 Paul commands that our "gentleness be known to all men". The word gentleness can also be translated, graciousness or forbearance. The reason we should exhibit gentleness is because "the Lord is at hand", a clear reference to the return of Jesus (James 5:7-9).

In verse 6 Paul commands us to be "anxious for nothing". This is in accordance to the command of Jesus in Matthew 6:25-34, but is one of the hardest things for us to do. Even though our names are written in the Book of Life, we constantly battle the feelings of worry. This is something we must strive to overcome. One way to do this is "prayer and supplication" with "thanksgiving". A supplication is a petition to the Lord on our behalf. Paul is instructing us to have a more fervent prayer life in order to alleviate the worries we are subject to (1 Thessalonians 5:17-18). Instead of being anxious we should let our requests "be made known to the Lord" through prayer and thanksgiving.

If we do this, Paul promises in verse 7 that the "peace of God" (John 14:27) which is beyond understanding, will protect our hearts and minds in Jesus. When we pray we reduce the amount of anxiety (worry) that we experience, replacing it with peace. This is a very comforting passage and is expanded upon in the next section.

The God of peace will be with you (Philippians 4:8-9)

In a passage that has a lot of similarities to 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, the Apostle Paul provides specific things for us to think and pray about instead of worrying. He urges us to think about things that are: true, noble (translated "honest" in the KJV), just (translated "right" in the NIV), pure (1 Thessalonians 5:22), lovely, and of good report (translated "admirable" in the NIV). If these are the types of thoughts we focus on we will not succumb to anxiety.

Paul continues in verse 8 stating that if there is any virtue (translated "if anything is excellent" in the NIV; see 2 Peter 1:5), or anything praiseworthy, we should think about these things, rather than things which lead to worry. In fact, Paul instructs us to "meditate" on these things. Meditation is one of the greatest spiritual disciplines that we can exercise. In addition to prayer and studying the word of God, we should add meditation to our Christian lifestyle. This would be where we spend time in solitude and silence with God, allowing us to clear our minds of those things which are not excellent or praiseworthy, while at the same time filling our minds with things that meet the descriptions found earlier in verse 8.

In verse 9 Paul again asks the Philippians to follow his example (Philippians 3:17). In this case he asks them to do the things they had "learned and received and heard and saw in me". This was possible because Paul had labored among the Philippians and they could remember his example. If they would do this Paul promises that the "God of peace will be with you". Only Christianity can provide real peace, true peace (Philippians 1:2). This is because of the Prince of Peace, Jesus. The promise that the God of peace would be with the Philippians is repeated by Paul in virtually all of his other Epistles and constitutes one of his main themes.

Generosity (Philippians 4:10-20)

Paul begins this section with the words, "But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last your care for me has flourished again". In this Epistle, rejoicing is

a common theme. Both the Apostle and the congregation experience great joy in their faith (Philippians 4:4). In this particular case, Paul is rejoicing because the Philippian church has once again found opportunity to assist him in preaching the gospel.

The Christians of Macedonia (where Philippi was located) had provided for Paul before (2 Corinthians 11:9), and as this chapter shows, the Philippian church is singled out for praise because of their generosity (Philippians 4:15-16). While they had been unable to provide for Paul at certain points in the past they now have renewed their assistance.

In verse 11 Paul states that he is not speaking in regard to need. He has learned to be content in poverty or wealth. This is something we Christians in the 21st Century need to learn. We are seldom content. We always want more. Many of the frustrations of our lives could be alleviated if we could simply be content. Paul instructed Timothy to be content with food and clothing (1Timothy 6:6-10). However, we seem intent on more than that. Since we can never gain enough possessions to satisfy our lust for more, we experience feelings of worry and greed. If only we would heed the words of Paul!

Paul states in verse 12 that he knows how to be abased and how to abound. He states that in all things he has learned to be hungry and full. Essentially what he is saying is that he has come to a point in his life where he is not worried about accumulating things. He will be content with what he has, and at this point, the Philippian Christians have supplied what he needed.

Verse 13 is one of the grand verses of the entire New Testament: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me". This is why we can be assured like Paul. We do not have to worry about accumulating possessions. We know that God will provide. We know that Christ enables us to overcome no matter the circumstances. We can only be fruitful in Christ (John 15:5).

Even though Paul did not speak from a position of need since he had learned to be content in his situation, he was pleased that the Philippian church had demonstrated their generosity once again (verse 14), especially in light of the fact that Paul was in distress (at the time of writing the Epistle he was in jail). Then, beginning in verse 15, he provides a synopsis of the benevolent activities of the Philippians.

In the beginning of the Gospel, that is, once the church was established in Europe, no other church had been as faithful in supporting Paul as the Philippians. When Paul departed from Macedonia (Acts 16:40) he went next to Thessalonica and Berea (neighboring cities in the province of Macedonia), and then on to Athens (which was in the adjacent province of Achaia). These missionary activities are recorded in Acts chapter 17.

Leaving Athens, Paul went to Corinth (in Achaia) and then back to Antioch in Syria (see Acts chapter 18). In Acts 18:5 we learn that while Paul was in Corinth, Silas and Timothy arrived there from Macedonia. In Acts chapter 19 Paul went to Ephesus (in Asia Minor, modern day Turkey), and in Acts chapter 20 he returned to Macedonia and the city of Philippi.

During all these travels Paul states that it was only the Philippians who had communicated with him concerning giving and receiving (Philippians 4:15, see also 2 Corinthians 11:8-9). In fact, the Philippians had assisted Paul numerous times while he was in Thessalonica (Philippians 4:16). Paul shows in verse 17 that it is not the benefit that he receives that was important, but rather the fact that the gift was sent. He seeks the fruit that abounds to the account of the Philippian Christians (Titus 3:14).

Paul has everything that he needs, in fact he is abounding because of the gift sent by the Philippians and delivered by Epaphroditus (Philippians 4:18). We have already seen from Philippians 2:25-30 that Epaphroditus was being sent back to Philippi by Paul. The gift that Epaphroditus had delivered is described in verse 18 as "a sweet smelling aroma", "an acceptable sacrifice (Hebrews 13:16; 2 Corinthians 9:12)", and "well pleasing to God".

As part of his thanksgiving for the Philippians' gift, Paul says that God will supply all their needs (verse 19). This is because of God's riches in glory by Christ Jesus. We should bring to mind the words of Psalm 23 in contemplating the blessings God will send to us. Paul's praise continues in verse 20, this time directed toward God Himself, "Now to our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen".

Conclusion (Philippians 4:21-23)

In the short conclusion to the Epistle to the Philippians, Paul instructs them to "Greet every saint in Christ Jesus" and then tells them, "All the saints

greet you". In New Testament usage, saints are not a special category of Christians, separated from the other followers of Christ. In the New Testament all Christians are known as saints. In this section Paul writes that there were even saints in Caesar's household.

The brethren who were with Paul also sent their greetings to the Philippian church. Paul ends this Epistle with, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen." As we saw in Philippians 1:2, the Epistle begins with grace and here it ends with grace. Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say rejoice!