

PHILIPPIANS BIBLE STUDY

Philippians 4:1-23

Lesson #18

A PRACTICAL CHRISTIAN LIFE

1 So then, in this way, my dearly loved brothers, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord, dear friends. 2 I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to agree in the Lord. 3 Yes, I also ask you, true partner, to help these women who have contended for the gospel at my side, along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers whose names are in the book of life.

By this point in the epistle, Paul feels that he's said what he needed to say, and begins to bring his epistle to a close, by turning to some personal and practical issues that the Philippians were facing at the time. He speaks of two ladies by name, and declares that they have both contended along side of him for the gospel. His exhortation is for them to agree in the Lord, and this is in keeping with what he said in chapter two which dealt heavily with this issue. Since everyone there apparently knew one another, he didn't have to elaborate on the issue, or issues, over which they seemed to have contention. This was probably well known to everyone in the church, and so Paul tells the whole church to work together in helping these women resolve their differences by coming to agreement in the Lord.

Notice that he didn't say that they should learn to how to agree to disagree, or how to just ignore the differences, but that they should come to *agreement in the Lord*, and the whole church was charged with the task of helping in this resolution. Simply agreeing to disagree isn't biblical unity, but it's precisely this that most churches have come to accept as the biblical mandate. At best this is a temporary substitute to keep order and avoid splits, but the real solution is for the whole church, under a gifted teacher, to earnestly pursue the truth, and come to agreement in the Lord. This is the biblical unity that's mandated for the church and is described in chapter two of this same epistle. When earnestly contending for the faith once delivered to the saints (Jude 1:3) is misconstrued as divisive, or contentious, then the pursuit of truth has been banned from the church, which is supposed to be the pillar and ground of the truth. (1 Ti m 3:15) Of course there are some who are simply contentious, and we're to told to identify and deal with them appropriately (Tit 3:10), but we mustn't ever come to a point where we consider every genuine question, or disagreement with church practice to be contentious in its nature. The disciples were forever questioning the Lord, and He answered them. (Sort of)

So it was that Paul urged the church to help these two dear sisters come to agreement in the Lord, as this is the real solution to church conflicts and disagreements. In my 30 years of Christian life I've never encountered a church without its various points of contention. But few indeed are the times when I've seen conflicts met solely with scriptures as the final determination. It's nearly impossible to keep pride and feelings and emotions out of the mix when determining what's true and what's not. This shouldn't be the situation in our churches, but from the beginning it has undeniably been that way. So, good and godly men and women must constantly and earnestly contend for the faith, by the relentless pursuit of the truth, but yet, we must do so with a gentle humility that was demonstrated to us by our Redeemer. So now, in closing, Paul actually puts some specific names and situations to what he's just told them in chapter two.

Verses 4-7:

4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! 5 Let your graciousness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. 6 Don't worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses every thought, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Paul had begun this epistle with words regarding his imprisonment at Rome, and the possibility of his execution, but that in spite of all this, the circumstances had actually turned out for the advancement of the gospel (1:12) It's relatively easy to tell someone else, or even yourself, not to worry about anything, but we all know that that's just not how we're wired. Most of us are always worried to some degree about something. Our jobs, our children, the economy, the price of gasoline, there's always something to worry about, and we usually take every opportunity to do so. In fact, we call those who never seem to worry about anything irresponsible.

Of course we are to be concerned for those things that we're charged with overseeing, and we're responsible to do all that we can to fulfill our responsibilities to God and to man, and to faithfully discharge this stewardship we've been assigned while here on earth.

But there are many things that fall outside of our capability to influence or control. We don't control natural disasters, or plagues, or famines, or earth quakes, or terrorist attacks, or a whole host of other potentially life threatening events, let alone the day to day dangers of city living. No matter how wealthy or poor, no matter how powerful or lowly, we realize that our sphere of real influence is actually very small when viewed in the overall cosmic scheme of things. And it is here that we begin to realize that we are all daily, and moment to moment, living entirely under the sovereign grace of our loving God. He knows our thoughts before we have them, and He knows the number of hairs on our heads. Nothing will ever happen to us that He doesn't know and control, and either cause or allow, in every way.

Now some have taken this to mean that nothing unpleasant will ever happen to God's children in this life, but the scriptures make it clear that just the opposite is usually the case. From His Son Jesus, to all of the Apostles, to thousands upon thousands of gentle Christian believers, the world has brought tragic and dire persecutions on many of God's beloved children. This doesn't mean that God wasn't looking, or didn't care, but that He has a particular purpose for His children, and often that purpose involves a preparation process that He sovereignly chooses to put them through. (Rev 2:8-11)

If your troublesome circumstances are brought about by your own negligence or misconduct then you may have cause to worry, but if you are denying ungodliness and worldly desires, and seeking to live sensibly, righteously and godly in this present age, then you may be free of worry as to those things over which you have no control, as your God is overseeing every situation of your life, both the triumphs and the tragedies, the successes and the failures, and through the strategic use of all of these, is preparing you for your eternal life with Him in His eternal kingdom. (Heb 12:4-8)

Because Paul understood and believed this, he could say in chapter one, while incarcerated in a Roman prison, that for him to live was Christ and to die was gain. And no matter which one occurred, he only wanted Christ to be glorified by it. He could have certainly used these verses here in chapter four right then and there, as he was demonstrating with his own life exactly what he was writing down with his pen.

There are times in all of our lives when we are at the end of our rope and hanging solely on the grace and mercy of God. I'll bet we've all been there a few times. It's here that we're forced to throw up our hands and cry, "Lord, it's all up to you, there's nothing I can do." For those who know God, this is a means of comfort that cannot be perceived by the unbeliever. Knowing that nothing escapes our loving Father, and no matter how bad it might get, He will love us and supply us with the unailing faith to endure the situation, even if He doesn't take it away. As with His own Son.

But there's no reason to wait for such dire circumstances to bask in the light of God's sovereignty over our lives. Every day we are His, and in every situation He is overseeing our growth and progress in the faith and in the knowledge and appreciation of Himself. So every day we should give Him thanks, not just when we're in dire trouble. And every day we should make our requests known to Him, as we offer Him our loving appreciation and thanksgiving for His many gifts, both those we have now and especially those we eagerly await at His coming. When our eye is on Christ, and our treasure is in heaven, then we can rejoice in every situation, and by this we are swept up into the peace of God that surpasses all human understanding. As the world continues its assault on the children of God, this peace will guard our hearts and our minds against all fear and doubt for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Paul says that this peace of God will guard our hearts and our minds. Notice that it doesn't say it will guard our bodies though. We might be asked to surrender them. This peace guards our **hearts** because we know the inseparable love of God for us (Rom 8:31-39) and that all things will ultimately work out for our good. (Rom 8:28)

And it guards our **minds** as we fully understand that whatever is happening is by our Father's consent, and is part of His intentional preparation process for those whom He has chosen to be eternally His own. Our understanding of His absolute sovereignty, like Job, brings us to utter submission to His will without complaints or questions or objections; so that we, like Paul can say "whether by life or by death" our only desire is to glorify our heavenly Father. Because we totally trust His judgements and the ultimate and final good that He has planned for every one of His elect children. (1Cor 2:9)

Verses 8-9:

8 Finally brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable—if there is any moral excellence and if there is any praise—dwell on these things. 9 Do what you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

Now Paul adds a summation phrase to his foregoing comments by saying “Finally brothers”, as if he’s saying therefore all that I’ve told you should issue in this kind of response. What kind of response? That the church should seek to focus its primary emphasis on those things that are true, and honorable, and pure, and lovely, and commendable. While every church is charged with contending for the truth, nevertheless that contending isn’t supposed to become the main issue. The main issues are those of Christlikeness in the believers. The teaching of the word, the exhortation to godliness and purity, the benefits and joys of a life that honors God and glorifies Jesus our Savior. These are the things that a church is made and constituted to preach and teach and eagerly pursue, without getting lost in the constant battles that unavoidably come. We must not let the battles themselves become the purpose of the church. It is those things that are true, and honorable, and just, and pure, that we go to battle to defend and preserve, so let us never lose their importance while in the struggles to preserve them. (Beware of extremes on either end - Discuss this)

Verses 10-14:

10 I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last you have renewed your care for me. You were, in fact, concerned about me, but lacked the opportunity [to show it] . 11 I don’t say this out of need, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. 12 I know both how to have a little, and I know how to have a lot. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret [of being content] —whether well-fed or hungry, whether in abundance or in need. 13 I am able to do all things through Him who strengthens me. 14 Still, you did well by sharing with me in my hardship. Phil 4:10-14 (HCSB)

Here Paul expresses his appreciation for the gift of support (most likely money) that the Philippians have sent to him by personal courier. He acknowledges that they have been helping to support him all along, even when others didn’t. Then he goes on to say that his appreciation isn’t out of the concerns of earthly needs, but rather out of his joy in their expression of appreciation and concern for himself.

What he says next is quite significant, because it’s obviously true about him when he says it. He says that he has learned how to be content with very little, and how to be content with much, and that he has learned how to properly manage his priorities and behaviors in either situation. This is no small accomplishment. In fact it’s impossible to achieve without a full grown faith in the future promises of God. One must wholehearted believe that Jesus Christ has risen from the dead, and is eternally Lord of all in the heavens and on the earth, and that He is in fact coming back to get those who are His, so that we will be with Him where He is. (Jn 14:1-3)

While this is our blessed hope, it’s not a blind hope but rather a fully informed hope. We’ve never been knocked to the ground and spoken to by Jesus. And we’ve never been caught up into heaven and heard things that aren’t permitted to be discussed; but, we’ve been regenerated and transformed by a rebirth that’s as undeniable as any miracle described in scriptures. The scriptures say that the Lord knows those who are His (2 Tim 2:19) and conversely, those who are his know that they are, because His Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are in fact His children. (Rom 8:16, 26)

It isn’t a guessing game for the true children, we know who our Father is, so we should all know where our treasure is also. Only when we know with certainty that this earthly realm isn’t our permanent home, but just our **temporary proving ground**, then we are able to achieve the mind set of Paul that we may learn to be content in this world with whatever we may have. This is what Paul meant when he said that he could do all things through Him (Christ) who strengthens him. He is strengthened by the knowledge that there is laid up for him a crown of righteousness that will be presented to him by Christ at the end of his earthly journey. How can we be discontent and grumble about our temporary circumstances when we know and believe this with absolute certainty?

At this point use verse 13 to make the point about how to interpret the bible within its proper context.

- a. Use example of saint burned at the stake by catholic church for denying the transubstantiation of bread and wine.
- b. Make point that words must be flexible enough for many contextual applications, otherwise need millions more.

Verses 15-20:

15 And you, Philippians, know that in the early days of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving except you alone. 16 For even in Thessalonica you sent [gifts] for my need several times. 17 Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that is increasing to your account. 18 But I have received everything in full, and I have an abundance. I am fully supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you provided—a fragrant offering, a welcome sacrifice, pleasing to God. 19 And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. 20 Now to our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Phil 4:15-20 (HCSB)

Paul has now moved his tone and content to a very personal and even fatherly perspective. He's making sure that they know that everything he's told them is from his concern for their ultimate welfare and his affection for them personally. He reassures them that God, his God, will look out for their needs, and all the glory for doing so must rightly be ascribed to Him.

Final Greetings

21 Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. Those brothers who are with me greet you. 22 All the saints greet you, but especially those from Caesar's household. 23 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

Phil 4:21-23 (HCSB)

Narrow Gate Baptist Church - Miami
Robert Andrews, Pastor

8 "And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write:

The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life, says this:

9 'I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. 10 'Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. 11 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death.'

Rev 2:8-11 (NASB)

4 You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin; 5 and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons,

"MY SON, DO NOT REGARD LIGHTLY THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD,
NOR FAINT WHEN YOU ARE REPROVED BY HIM;

6 FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES,
AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES."

7 It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? 8 But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.

Heb 12:4-8 (NASB)

31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? 32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? 33 Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; 34 who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. 35 Who will separate us from the love of Christ ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36 Just as it is written,

"FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG;
WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED."

37 But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 8:31-39 (NASB)

28 And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. 29 For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; 30 and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.

Romans 8:28-30 (NASB)

9 but just as it is written,

"THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD,
AND WHICH HAVE NOT ENTERED THE HEART OF MAN,
ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM."

1 Cor 2:9 (NASB)

1 "Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. 2 "In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. 3 "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also.

John 14:1-3 (NASB)