

## STUDY ON THE BOOK OF PHILIPPIANS

### REJOICE IN THE LORD ALWAYS!

Read Philippians 4:1-9

#### **Introduction**

Dissention and bickering are selfish reactions to not getting one's own way. This passage begins with a plea to Euodia and Syntyche to *"be of the same mind in the Lord,"* but concludes with a profound teaching on how to find inner peace through prayer and trust.

#### **My Joy and My Crown**

*"Therefore, my beloved and longed-for brethren, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, beloved."* (v1)

Verse 1 is a transition verse. Paul calls the Philippian believers to stand firm in the face of Judaizers and immoral Christians who would lead them astray. Paul deeply loves this church, and this love shows up again and again. Here he refers to them as *"beloved and longed-for brethren"*. Paul used the ancient Greek word for "crown" that described the crown given to an athlete who had won the race. It was a crown of achievement (a *stephanos*); not the crown that was given to a king (a *diadema*). The Philippians, as they stand fast in the Lord, were Paul's trophy.

#### **Instructions to Euodia and Syntyche.**

*"I implore Euodia and I implore Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord."* (v2)

Here are two Christian sisters, each of whom Paul knows well and has worked with in the Gospel. But they can't seem to get along. Paul's exhortation is quite strong. He uses the word "plead" (NIV), "beseech" (KJV), and "implore" (NKJV), Greek *parakaleō*, which means here *"to make a strong request for something, implore, entreat."* He doesn't just use the word once, but twice -- one urging for each of the women: *"I implore Euodia! And I implore Syntyche!"* When they hear this letter read aloud, they won't be able to mistake the intensity and urgency of Paul's command.

He calls them to *"agree with each other,"* (NIV), to *"be of the same mind"* (NRSV, KJV). Why did it have to come to this? Pride has a way of capturing us. It's not my fault, Euodia argues, it's hers. She should be the one apologizing to me! Sometimes it isn't even a real disagreement, just an attitude thing, a spat that has gone unhealed and begun to fester. Their animosity toward one another has begun to infect the Body. It must stop. Whatever the dispute was about, Euodia and Syntyche had forgotten that they have a greater common ground in Jesus Christ. They forgot that everything else was less important than that common ground.

#### **Instructions to the true companion.**

*"And I urge you also, true companion, help these women who laboured with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the Book of Life."* (v3)

Whoever this *"true companion"* was, Paul instructed him/her to help these women who laboured with me in the gospel. The true companion was supposed to help these women to reconcile and come to one mind in the Lord. (There have been various theories about who this was, but no one really knows.) He names Clement as another fellow worker. Clement was a common name in this era, so it is speculative to try to link him to Clement of Rome, who wrote a letter to the church at Corinth about 95 AD.

Paul concludes this paragraph with a reference to "rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the Book of Life," these were others in Philippi who also helped Paul. They had the greatest honour in the world: to have their names in the Book of Life as a reminder of the promise of eternal life. Cities had lists of citizens. This book is the book of citizenship in the Kingdom of God, a list of those destined to inherit eternal life. (Other references to the book of life are found in: Exodus 32:32; Psalm 69:28; Isaiah 4:3; Ezekiel 13:9; Daniel 12:1; Luke 10:20; Revelation 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12,15; and 21:27.)

### Rejoice in the Lord Always

*"Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I will say, rejoice! Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand."* (vv4-5)

Despite the circumstance from which it was written, joy is all over the letter to the Philippians. This isn't just a just an empty encouragement to "be happy" or "have a good day." Paul commands them to rejoice "in the Lord." Rejoicing is not merely a passive, spontaneous reaction; as a command it is to be a deliberate action. The Philippian Christians are to take joy, that is, find joy, in the fact of God's love for them, that Jesus has died for their sins, in the promise that their names are written in the Book of Life, that the Holy Spirit is with them constantly, that they have eternal life with God. "Rejoice in the Lord!"

Joying in the Lord is not an experience but a command? Is it not just what come on thrill-seekers in the Holy Spirit but an expectation that all Christians will live-in.

How do you obey this command? The answer is found in asking the Lord himself to open your heart and life to joy. Ask Jesus to teach you to rejoice in him. Then follow the promptings he gives you. This is not some magic or spiritual bonus, but your heritage of joy in a growing relationship with your Lord. Did you know that your God takes joy you:

*"The Lord your God in your midst, the Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing."* (Zephaniah 3:17)

Now he wants you share in this mutual rejoicing. I'll leave it at that, confident that God will teach you how to rejoice as you seek him. He will guide you to this joy.

Finally, notice that this rejoicing is not to be occasional, but constant, continual -- "always." It is to be an attitude of mind in the Lord and towards the Lord. Just as we are taught to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17), we are to rejoice always.

### Gentleness and Awareness of the Hour

Remember the context of this instruction -- the dissension between Euodia and Syntyche. Rejoicing must take the place of bitterness! He counsels them to focus on "gentleness" (NIV, NRSV) or "moderation" (KJV) toward one another instead of rancour. The Greek adjective is *epieikēs*, "a humble, patient steadfastness, which is able to submit to injustice, disgrace, and maltreatment without hatred or malice, trusting God in spite of it all." "Let your gentleness be known to all men" he tells them. Instead of asserting their rights towards each other, Paul calls Euodia and Syntyche to a manifest and open gentleness and a willingness to be wronged without carrying a grudge. That is the path to reconciliation. It starts with you.

Then he adds, "The Lord is near." This was John the Baptist's message, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" (Matthew 3:2). Jesus picked it up as well (Matthew 4:17) and instructed the disciples to preach the same message (Matthew 10:7). Peter declared, "But the end of all things is at hand; therefore, be serious and watchful in your prayers." (1 Peter 4:7). With Christ's coming imminent, this is no time to carry on a feud in the church! Get your act together, girls!

## Cure for Anxiety

*“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God” (v6)*

Paul says: “Be anxious for nothing” ... This is a command, not an option. Undue care is an intrusion into an arena that belongs to God alone. Do you find yourself worrying, flirting with fear of the "What if?" Do you wake up at night and can't get back to sleep because some problem captures your mind and forces you to go over the worst possible scenarios in your mind at 2 am?

Here's how to deal with anxiety and worry. This may seem simplistic at first glance, but it's not. Let's examine Paul's instruction phrase by phrase.

### **Don't Be Anxious (4:6a)**

Here's the command: "Be anxious for nothing!" We aren't just to banish the thought of fear and worry from our mind. That doesn't work. Paul tells us not to be anxious, then explains how to accomplish this.

### **Anything and Everything (4:6b)**

Notice how comprehensive Paul is. He says, "Don't be anxious about anything." Then he gives them instructions that apply "in everything." Your situation and mine do not lie outside the scope of these spiritual principals.

### **Present Your Requests to God (4:6e)**

These two aspects of prayer are similar, but distinct. Prayer is a broader word that can mean all of our communication with God, but supplication directly asks God to do something. Many of our prayers go unanswered because we do not ask God for anything. Here God invites us simply to let your requests be made known. He wants to know.

### **With Thanksgiving (4:6d)**

This guards against a whining, complaining spirit before God when we let our requests be made known. We really can be anxious for nothing, pray about everything, and be thankful for anything.

### **God's Peace Will Guard Your Mind**

*“...and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” (v7)*

Paul is teaching us how to deal with anxiety. The first lesson is to bring our anxieties to God – with thanksgiving. The second lesson is to trust God to guard your mind. Anxiety is the antithesis of peace.

Here is God's promise concerning peace: When you pray with thanksgiving, God's peace will guard your heart and mind. "Guard" is the Greek verb *phroureō*, generally, "to provide security, guard, protect, keep". God will provide security over your mind. His peace will banish your turmoil and worry.

How could this happen? you wonder. How could God do this in my situation? My problem is eating me alive!

This peace is described as that which goes beyond your rational understanding and thought processes. "Transcends" (NIV), "passeth" (KJV), "surpasses" (NRSV) is the Greek verb *hyperechō*, "to surpass in quality or value, be better than, excel." Is this kind of peace new to you? It is your heritage in Christ. You follow Paul's instructions on how to pray with thanksgiving, and then deliberately trust God to bring you

this quality of peace that goes beyond your understanding. If it doesn't come fully, immediately, be patient, rest in God that he will quiet your spirit and help you.

### **Meditate On These Things**

*“Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things. The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.” (vv8-9)*

If you're trying to get victory over anxiety but always let your mind, go back to your worries, you'll lose. Instead, you need to deliberately turn your mind to something else and dwell on that. "Meditate On" is the Greek verb *logizomai*, primarily a mathematical and accounting term, then of cognitive processes. Here it means, "to give careful thought to a matter, think (about), consider, ponder, let one's mind dwell on something."

Paul's list of things on which we should meditate translates well from the Greek to the English; there is no great need for elaboration upon each item.

**Noble... just... pure... lovely... good report... virtue... praiseworthy:** These, Paul would say, are the fruit and the food of the mind that is guarded by the peace of God. When we put these good things into our mind, they stay in our mind and then come forth from us.

**Meditate on these things:** Much of the Christian life comes down to the mind. Romans 12:2 speaks of the essential place of being transformed by the renewing of your mind and 2 Corinthians 10:5 speaks of the importance of casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. What we choose to meditate on matters.

Paul concludes in verse 9 that he, Paul had the integrity to present himself as an example of all these things to the Philippians. He really could say, "Follow me as I follow Jesus." If the Philippians did as Paul had instructed, not only would they have had the peace of God, but the God of peace would have also been with them.