

# Philippians (4:1-9)

As he nears the end of his letter to the Philippians, Paul encourages Christian maturity. Like every pastor whose charge it is to “shepherd the church of God” (Acts 20:28), Paul seeks to foster endurance in the faith by a series of exhortations that are attitudinal in nature and not merely doctrinal or behavioral.

## I. Stand Firm in Unity (4:1-3)

### A. Transition (4:1)

1. This verse is transitional. It looks back to what has just been said (“Therefore”), and it looks forward by explaining what it means to stand firm. Paul implores the Philippians to:
  - a) Imitate worthy Christian examples (3:17), resist “enemies of the cross” (3:18-19), look forward to Christ’s return, and
  - b) Maintain like-mindedness with one another (4:2-3).
2. Note that the exhortation is enveloped by endearing terms “my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown . . . dear friends.” The Philippians held a special place in Paul’s heart (cf., 1:8).
3. “You are my joy and the reward for my work” (NLT). There is no greater complement bestowed on shepherds than for them to see real growth and progress in their sheep.

### B. A Case of Disunity (4:2)

1. Paul pleads with two women to get along. He does *not* issue any heavy-handed commands or rebukes. Instead, he comes along side Euodia and Syntyche and urges unity (*παρακαλῶ*, repeated for each so as to avoid all appearances of taking sides).
2. We do not know the nature of their dispute, but we can say that it was nothing of doctrinal import, as Paul would have dealt with it in this letter per his typical fashion. It is possible that it was merely a personality conflict. Regardless, Paul saw a threat to the church at Philippi and, therefore, believes it important enough to address explicitly.
3. The specific appeal was for Euodia and Syntyche to literally “think the same thing” or be like-minded (same word used in 2:2). This is not some sentimental appeal to love one another and drop the dispute at the expense of truth (cf., Rom. 12:9 and Eph. 4:15 where Paul insists that love and truth belong together). Nor is this an impossible demand to agree on every matter of doctrine and practice. Instead, Paul expects that believers will have the same basic orientation and priorities. Where there are genuine differences, most could be resolved by taking out our Bibles and submitting our stance to Scripture.

### C. A Case for Mediation (4:3)

1. By appealing to his “loyal yokefellow” for assistance in restoring peace, Paul is highlighting the significance of the dispute.
2. Recall that this letter was addressed to the entire Philippian community and to its leaders (1:1). Presumably, it was intended to be read aloud to the congregation. Hence, by using personal names in this dispute and appealing to a mediator (no doubt known to Paul and the Philippians), an accountability mechanism before the entire congregation was set into place for a firm and sure resolution (cf., Mt. 18:15-20).

## II. Be Persistent in Joy and Prayer (4:4-7)

### A. A Major Theme for the Mature: Rejoice (4:4)!

1. Paul has inserted the theme of joy throughout this letter. He prays with joy (1:4-5), dies with joy (2:17-18), and lives with joy in the Lord (3:1). *Joy is a composed, inner conviction that God is in control of all circumstances*, even those of Paul’s imprisonment! It is evidence of the Spirit’s presence (Gal. 5:22; Rom. 14:17).
2. “In one sense, this injunction is so self-evidently right that it is embarrassing that we should have to be reminded of it” (Carson, *Basics for Believers*, p. 104).
3. We are to rejoice (rest in God’s control) “always.” Theoretically, there is never a time when we should question God’s care for us. When we do, our joy is the first thing to go. After all, if no One is in control, then life is ultimately meaningless, history is going nowhere, and hope is a mere illusion.

4. Certainly, the beginning of our joy is knowing that our sins have been forgiven once and for all and that we're on our way to heaven (1 Pt. 1:8-9). But, it does not end there. Paul calls on the Philippians to rejoice while he was under arrest, imprisoned, and possibly facing death!
5. Although our joy should not be derived *from* our circumstances ("rejoice *in the Lord*"), there is a sense in which we can and must find joy *in* our circumstances because "we know that *in* [not from] *all things* God works for the good of those who love him" (Rom. 8:28). It is with this mindset that we find God's strength ("the joy of the LORD is your strength," Neh. 8:10).
6. Hence, our joy is related to our sense of God's meticulous sovereignty (Mt. 10:29-31). When are we to rejoice? "Always!" How long are we to rejoice? "Always!" Here there is no blind optimism, but a deep sense that God is "always" there for us to rejoice in Him, despite our lot in life. Here there is healing and wholesome living. Here there is wellness of soul. Here we come face to face with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

*Be still, my soul; the Lord is on thy side;  
Bear patiently the cross of grief or pain;  
Leave to thy God to order and provide;  
In every change He faithful will remain.  
Be still, my soul: thy best, thy heav'nly Friend  
Thro' thorny ways leads to a joyful end.*

— Katharina von Schlegel, 1752

**B. *More Evidence of Maturity: Gentleness (4:5)***

1. The word for gentleness has the idea of humility or self-effacing effort. Rather than being known for our wit, wisdom, or wealth, we should be known for putting others first (Philip. 2:3-4).
2. The reason we are to pursue gentleness is because "the Lord is near." There are two possible ideas that Paul may have had in mind:
  - a) Geographical/Spatial: Since Jesus' return is immanent ("immanent" is not to be confused with pre-tribulation rapture), we should be mindful of our ethics (cf., 2 Pt. 3:11)
  - b) Relational/Personal: Since Jesus by His Spirit is present both in and among us, we should live as though He were physically here (cf., Mt. 18:20).
3. The latter is more likely. Jesus insists that, in some sense, it is better that he is not physically present with us because of the continuing help of God's Spirit in our lives (Jn. 16:7). That Jesus is not visibly present is no handicap to us who share in the presence of Christ through his Spirit (Rom. 8:9). The presence of the Spirit is like having Christ himself present. Indeed, Jesus said to his disciples he would send "another Counselor," which implies that they already have One (Jn. 14:16). As our Counselor and Helper, Jesus has merely extended his residence to the courts of heaven as well as remaining here on earth by His Spirit.

**C. *The Mature Worry about Nothing, Pray about Everything, and Experience Peace (4:6-7)***

1. With the advent in communications we have plenty of opportunity to worry on a global scale. The invention of the printing press, the telegraph, the telephone, the radio, the television, airplanes, computers, satellites, internet and e-mail, provides a wealth of worry widgets. There are more occasions to worry about peace, famine, economics, politics, and portfolios than ever before. It seems that the more we know, the more we worry and the less we trust.
2. Paul says the alternative to worrying is prayer. It is difficult if not impossible to be a chronic worrier while having a prolific and fruitful prayer life. At its most basic level, prayer is an expression of our trust and dependence upon God. Consequently, prayer and worry are as opposed as light and dark.
3. We are to pray about "everything." God will not be excluded from one detail of our lives. Of course, when we do exclude Him, anxiety plants its feet firmly in our soul eclipsing our joy.
4. Prayer is not an escape mechanism whereby we seek to live above the circumstances that cause us worry. This passage does not deny the anxieties of life, but tells us what to do with them.
5. The attitude in which we present our requests to God is one of "thanksgiving." How can we possibly be thankful to God for the things/people that cause us stress without simultaneously holding to a strong sense of God's sovereignty?

6. It is in the midst of extreme suffering that the Hebrew believers are encouraged to “continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise” (Heb. 13:15). This necessarily entails an attitude of thanksgiving to God for how he sovereignly uses the pressures of life to bring about our growth and his glory (see Gen. 50:20). Hence, thankfulness is related to our sense of God’s meticulous sovereignty.
7. The result of rejoicing in the Lord (4:4), pursuing humility (4:5), and prayerful thanksgiving (4:6) is supernatural peace. It is supernatural because only God can give it thorough Christ (Jn. 14:27; Col. 3:15).
8. It is true that there are conditions (4:4-6) under which God’s peace obtains. However, we must distinguish between conditions and causes. That is, we should not think that there is a mere formula for causing or experiencing the peace of God. Since our natural proclivity is to complain under pressure rather than rejoice and give thanks, it will always be the case that our rejoicing and thanksgiving is done by God’s gracious and empowering Spirit and never produced from within us.
9. More important, this is a peace that results, not from answered prayer, but from resting in God’s control. Put differently, the peace of God is certain whether our requests are granted or not. It is a peace that guards our minds and hearts from worry and anxiety over our circumstances. Therefore, peace, like thankfulness, is related to our sense of God’s meticulous sovereignty.

*Those who live in the shelter of the Most High  
will find rest in the shadow of the Almighty.  
This I declare of the Lord:  
He alone is my refuge, my place of safety;  
he is my God, and I am trusting him.  
(Psalm 91:1-2, NLT)*

### III. Dwell on Worthy Thoughts (4:8)

#### A. *You Are What You Think!*

1. Any and all sinful behavior can be traced to our thought life (Jm. 1:13-15). David knew that real reform began with his thoughts (Ps. 139:23-24) and Jesus taught that murder and adultery begin in the heart (Mt. 5:21-22, 27-30). Here, Paul tells us to use our minds for holy thoughts.
2. Jesus prayed that we would be sanctified with God’s Word (Jn. 17:17) and there is no better way to rid ourselves of unwholesome thoughts than a steady diet of truth from God. Moreover, our minds are to be continually renewed so as to discern God’s will (Rom. 12:2). The Psalmist tells us that a sure defense against sin (Ps. 119:9-11) is to hide God’s Word in our hearts, as well as our computers.
3. How this verse bears on our time before the television or computer is obvious. We should never be entertained by that which is an abomination to our God. We must be “wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil” (Rom. 16:19).

### IV. Follow the Example of Godly People (4:9)

#### A. *Imitate Leaders Whose Minds Are Disciplined*

1. This verse is tied to the previous in that we are to follow the pattern of those whose thought life is under the Spirit’s control.
2. Paul urges us to not just observe godly behavior but practice it.
3. Jesus said that the key to a truly happy life is living out what we know God is telling us (Jn. 13:17).
4. In summary, God’s peaceful presence will be evident to us when we live in harmony with other believers (4:2-3), rejoice in the Lord always (4:4), petition God for taking control of our circumstances (4:6), think holy thoughts (4:8), and practice godly living by modeling our lives after mature believers (4:9).