

Philippians

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Philippians 4:1-7

Vs. 1

- Paul has spent a lot of energy in Ch. 3 confronting the internal threats to the health and well being of the Philippian church. Ultimately, he challenged them to simply follow his example of how to live the Christian life, the Christ-like life. But he doesn't want to focus on the negative things within the church. He wants to bring his letter to a close on a positive note.
- Paul here returns to his deep affection for the Philippians. They are his brothers whom he loves and yearns for. They are his family. More than that, they are Paul's "joy and crown". Any teacher or coach who has students or players who go on to surpass all their goals and expectations are always a source of pride, a source of joy. As Paul looks at the way the church has grown, both in numbers and in spiritual depth, he cannot help but feel joy well up inside his heart.
- They are Paul's crown. As we saw repeatedly in Revelation, there are two Greek words for our word "crown". *Diadema* means a royal crown. Here Paul uses the second word, ***stephanos***, which was the Greek word for a crown given for victory and honor. The winner of the Olympic games would receive a *stephanos*. Also the guests at a formal dinner party, or a wedding, or some other celebratory feast would receive a *stephanos*. The Philippian church is the victory trophy of all of Paul's work, the source of whatever honor he may bear.
- "This is who you are to me!...don't mess it up!" Stand firm/stand fast. These would be the exhortation a centurion might give his troops just before they are attacked. "Hold the line! Stand firm. Don't give up an inch! We cannot be pushed back!" Words that the Roman veterans in the Philippian church would know well. "You stood for Rome. Now stand for the Kingdom of God!"

Vss.2-3

- Paul does indeed want to stay positive as he writes the concluding words of this letter, but you can almost feel his anxiety. You can easily imagine him setting down his quill or stylus after he writes the last line and thinks on the people of the Philippian church and the struggles and dangers they face, struggles and dangers he cannot be present to protect them from.
- There were two key women in the church that Paul had great respect for, but the two were at odds with each other. Both had Greek names, so a conflict over Jewish Law seems unlikely. It may be simply a personality issue. Paul has nothing but good things to say about each woman, that they had shared Paul's struggles "in the cause of the gospel". It may be that the two women hosted two of the house congregations in Philippi. We know from Acts 16 that the first home of the Philippian church was in the home of Lydia, Philippi's first convert. Paul wrote to the Corinthian church in 1 Corinthians 14:34 that "the women are to keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak...", but Philippi was not Corinth. Corinth was in Greece, southern Greece. In Greek culture it was not merely that women were to be seen and not heard, they were not even to be seen. The goal of a respectable Greek woman was to "see as little, hear as little, and ask as little as possible". She would never be seen on the streets without an escort. She would never eat meals with the male members of the household and had her own apartment within the house. And no respectable woman would ever take up any part of public life. Philippi was not in Greece, but in Macedonia and things were very different there. Women had a much bigger role in society. We forget that in truth, Alexander the Great was not from Greece, but from Macedonia, and the record is quite clear concerning the public role his mother played. Archeological evidence in Macedonia shows that women ran businesses and were such public figures that statues were built in their honor. Remember, for Paul nothing was more important than the promulgation of the gospel. In Athens he reshaped his sermon to fit Athenian culture. In Acts 16, Paul circumcised an adolescent Timothy to accommodate the Jewish culture of the area. Remember, Paul counts all things as rubbish compared to "the surpassing value of knowing

Christ Jesus...” (3:8). So if women are to be silent in Corinth because that’s how things work in Corinth, that’s ok with Paul. If women are to have a leading role in Macedonia, because that’s how things work in Macedonia, that’s ok with Paul too. Whatever it takes, as long as the purity of the gospel of Christ is upheld...all that matters is that the gospel is preached (1:18).

- What’s not ok is anything that pollutes the gospel or damages the purity, witness and effectiveness of the church. Regardless of the position the women may have held or their history with Paul’s work for the gospel, their feud must stop. Paul calls on a mystery comrade, and on a long-time fellow worker named Clement, and on all the church’s leadership, Paul’s fellow workers, to help the women end their quarrel, so that the church itself is not damaged. As Baptists well know, the first casualty of church infighting is evangelism. No one wants to join a brawl they know nothing about unless they just enjoy fighting. No one wants to live in a burning house.

Vss. 4-7

- So Paul puts his pen down and prays for the Euodia and Syntyche and the church and when he lifts his eyes again he is confident that all will be well. Thus he returns to the positive ending he wanted!
- Rejoice! God has given you the victory over internal church conflict. Rejoice! Your unity will make you indestructible to any outside foe (1:28)! Rejoice! Your joy is in the Lord, not in your circumstances, empowering you to truly be able to rejoice always!!
- What the NASB translates as “forbearing spirit” is a Greek word that’s just tough to translate into English. Virtually every translation of the Bible uses a different word: patience, softness, gentleness. Weymouth was first to translate it “forbearing spirit”. The word is *epieikeia*. It gets at the sort of faith in action, the sort of spirit that Jesus showed the woman caught in adultery. The Law said she should be put death, but Jesus showed her grace that transcended the Law. The same is found in the Good Samaritan story. The Samaritan didn’t just help the man, he went way beyond that to insure the man’s well-being. It’s what Jesus is getting at in the Sermon on the Mount when He says not to go just the

one mile you are compelled to go but go two miles. Don't just surrender your shirt but surrender your coat too. In other words, love excessively, love extravagantly. "Let your excessive, extravagant love be known to all men. The Lord is near."

- Remember, this is a man in prison, literally in chains, who writes, "Be anxious for nothing...". And how is it possible that we can be free from worry? Prayer! "In **everything**" pray, giving thanks to our Father in Heaven who you, and who is able. To pray giving thanks to God in every situation again points to how our joy is in the Lord not in our circumstances. Our well-being is in the Lord not in our circumstances. Understanding this, to pray always with thanksgiving shows our gratitude to our father who IS with us. To pray always with thanksgiving shows our true submission to His will for our lives. Whatever may come, whatever His will may be, we are at peace and we have joy, because we have Jesus and He has us.
- Because Jesus has us, we have peace which surpasses all human understanding or comprehension. When the Christians were being torn to pieces by animals in the Roman Coliseum for sport, they would walk into the arena singing, just as Paul and Silas sang in the Philippian jail, and these believers would continue to sing until they were all killed. The Roman spectators hated it and were confused by it. What could cause people about to be executed in a horrible way to have such peace, such joy, which fueled such courage?
- This kind of peace is unshakeable. This kind of peace, God's peace, stands like a sentinel over your heart and mind. Paul uses a term he knows well and sees daily. **Phrourein** is a military word for a soldier standing at his guard post. God's peace cannot be moved away from your life.
- We are to stand firm **in the Lord** (vs.1). We are to live in harmony **in the Lord** (vs.2). We are to rejoice **in the Lord** (vs. 4). And the peace of God will guard our hearts and minds **in Christ Jesus** (vs.7). Our strength, our unity, our joy, our peace, all we enjoy as Christians is found **in Christ Jesus!!**