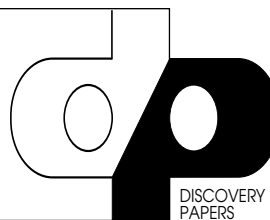


# KNOWING PEACE IN THE LORD

SERIES: JESUS, OUR JOY



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Philippians 4:1-9  
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Gary Vanderet  
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Recently, a Bible verse caught my attention as I was casually reading through Acts. When I read this verse, I could read no further. Acts 9:31 says, "So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up; and, going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase." What amazed me were the circumstances that surrounded this sentence. The leaders of the church were being imprisoned, and the believers were being threatened. Stephen's martyrdom had just occurred, and the memory of that experience lingered in their minds. As history shows, a bloodbath was imminent.

Yet the church throughout Palestine enjoyed peace and continued to increase! Against all odds, they flourished. Instead of shriveling into a camp of bitter, negative and frightened people, they remained winsome and magnetic. This brought to my mind the insightful words of Reinhold Niebuhr:

You may be able to compel people to maintain certain minimum standards by stressing duty, but the highest moral and spiritual achievements depend not upon a push but a pull. People must be charmed into righteousness.

We need to learn this truth. These early believers were un-intimidated, determined, resilient, and peaceful. Somehow they maintained a loving atmosphere, an authentic appeal of positive acceptance. No amount of pressure from without disturbed their peace within. All it takes for most of us to lose our peace is one football game! This was not true of the early church, and the result was predictable. People could not stay away from their meetings.

But a situation in the church at Philippi was disrupting the peace of the body. As Paul has been demonstrating throughout this book, only our unity as a church can face the world's affronts without being defeated. Only a united church can have the magnetic appeal as found in Acts 9. It may well be that Paul's primary purpose for writing this book was to solve the conflict between Euodia and Syntyche. In fact, all of the truth we have learned from chapters 1 through 3 discusses both the importance of unity and how to experience its power. As is often the case, public problems may require private solutions.

After revealing the need for peace by pointing out the conflict in the opening verses of chapter 4, Paul then gives two promises about peace. He also tells us the conditions that must be met if we are going to experience this peace. I pray that we will examine ourselves and our church body to determine if we have this magnetic quality of peace. If we do not have it, we will discover what we can do individually in our own lives.

Let us look as Paul outlines the need for peace in verse 1 through 3.

## I. THE NEED FOR PEACE 4:1-3

**Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown, so stand firm in the Lord, my beloved. I urge Euodia and Syntyche to live in harmony**

**in the Lord. Indeed, true comrade, I ask you also to help these women who have shared my struggle in the cause of the gospel, together with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow-workers, whose names are written in the book of life.**

In this passage, Paul mentions the situation which was affecting the unity of the body at Philippi. Paul calls on two otherwise unknown believers, Euodia and Syntyche, to settle their differences.

The cause of this disagreement is not given to us. We are not told if the problem is doctrinal, ethical, or personal because this is not Paul's worry. He is merely concerned with the fact that these two women are at odds with one another and that their conflict has brought division in the fellowship.

It is also interesting that Paul does not take sides in the matter. He does not say to either one of them, "You are wrong and must apologize." Nor does he soothingly say, "There are two sides to every story. You are both partially right and wrong. Therefore, kiss and make up." This is not a matter of who is right or wrong or where the blame lies. He simply urges both of the women to take the initiative to go to the other person and be reconciled.

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### **When there is disharmony inside the Church, there is bound to be defeat outside**

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In these verses, Paul points out why division in the body is wrong. First, it runs contrary to how we are to view other believers. Look at the apostle's attitude toward the Philippians. As we learned in the last message, his life is not only exemplary but normative. Therefore, Paul's attitude is a model for us. Notice his words: "My beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and my crown, . . . my beloved." We are a family, and our attitudes toward one another ought to reflect tender affection. Perhaps, if we loved one another in this manner, then we would recognize the scandal of division. Our callous attitudes toward one another cause us to look at our differences with shallow concern.

Second, Paul reminds us of our fundamental oneness. He says, "They have shared my struggle in the cause of the gospel." To agree on the gospel is the most fundamental unity of heart and mind. The singleness of the task, proclaiming the gospel, ought to be reflected in the singleness of the workers performing the task.

Paul also mentions, "Their names are written in the book of life." As we saw in chapter 3, there is a heavenly reality involved in the church. The church on earth is to be a replica of the heavenly kingdom. Our heavenly citizenship calls us to live life now with all the privileges and duties of our distant homeland. Since there are no divisions in heaven, there should be none here.

Lastly, Paul reminds us that division among Christians is a serious flaw in the church's armor against the world. This is why he begins these verses with "stand firm in the Lord." For the second time in the book, Paul allows his thoughts to travel

along the same line. In chapter one, he said, “Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ; so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I may hear that you are *standing firm* in one Spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.” He reminded us then that there were opponents to the gospel whose strong opposition could easily stampede the Christians in terror. In 4:1, we are told to stand firm because the self-indulgent examples of the enemies of the cross could lead Christians astray. His argument in chapter one was that only a united church could present a united front; our steadfastness is grounded in our unity. He exhorted us to be of the same mind. Here he exhorts us “to live in harmony.” When there is disharmony inside the church, there is bound to be defeat outside. When Christians cannot bear the sight of each other, they will not be able to look the world in the eyes either.

Our unity is so important Paul asks that others in the body help these two sisters. The very existence of the need is a call for rescue. Notice that Paul does not tell Euodia and Syntyche to ask this “true comrade” to help them. Rather, he calls on the comrade to go uninvited and do what he can. We *are* our brothers’ keeper. We are never at liberty to stand aloof when brothers and sisters cannot get along. If we have trouble with our car, we do not give up driving. If our roof has a leak, we do not abandon the house. The irony of it all is that when conflicts arise, only rarely do people stay around long enough to work them out. We usually bail out and try to stay as far away as we can.

Since we desperately need one another, we need to live in harmony. We will never have that magnetic quality of peace without it. Peace was needed in the body of Philippi. Having shared the need, Paul now presents two associated promises. Look at verse 7 and the end of verse 9.

## II. THE PROMISE OF PEACE 4:7, 9b

**And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus...and the God of peace shall be with you.**

There are two promises revealed in these verses.

### A. Our Lives Will Be Touched with a Mark of the Supernatural

Paul first mentions that we will receive something that “surpasses all comprehension.” Paul’s meaning here is not that peace is something mysterious and incomprehensible in its own right, but that it is something which others will not be able to explain away. It is beyond the range of human comprehension. I think that much of our struggle in standing firm for Christ lies in the fact that people do not see why we want to be different. They attribute our standards to personal whims or preference—like the lady whose obituary remarked that “her chief hobby was religion.” What we desperately need in our lives, and what our neighbors need to see, is what is promised here—something supernatural that cannot be explained away by anything except, “This is obviously the hand of God.” This is the peace promised here.

Paul reveals the second promise in verse 9.

### B. Our Lives Will Be Guarded by the Peace and Presence of God

The second promise is that God’s peace will guard us and that God himself will be our companion. Paul says, “The peace of God...shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. And the God of peace shall be with you.” This

imagery pictures a besieged fortress. The castle is the Christian’s inner life, his mind and heart. If the castle can be held, then progress and growth in the Christian life will occur. If it can be captured, then spiritual degeneracy will follow.

The beautiful truth is that it is heavily garrisoned. The castle’s walls are constantly patrolled, and its sentries never sleep at their posts. These troops are the “praetorian guard” of the King of kings, and they march beneath the standard of the peace of God. Our hearts and minds are kept at rest, for their companion is the King himself, the God of peace. What a promise!

The supernatural mark in a Christian’s life is the presence of peace. The use of the word “peace” today carries the idea of a spiritual marshmallow, soft and sweet but without much substance. But biblically, the term is full of strength and vitality. The God of peace is the God who makes peace between himself and sinners. Thus, peace is linked to God’s work of salvation. It is the fruit of Calvary. The God of peace is also the God of power who raised our Lord Jesus from the dead. Another passage tells us that the God of peace will crush Satan under our feet. Security, victory, power—all of these ideas are inherent in the word.

In fact, the word is taken from the Hebrew word “shalom” which describes a sense of well-being, wholeness, contentment, confidence, and security which is the heritage of the people of God. This peace is not only inward, but outward as well. It is a peace that not only promises to master internal anxiety but also to mend our broken relationships. This fortress is strong enough to be an antidote for anxiety and to handle all our wrong feelings toward brothers or sisters.

This ability to be at peace and to live in peace is the unmistakable supernatural mark of a Christian’s life. This is the promise presented in this passage. This is what our neighbors long to see.

There are some conditions attached to this promise. Paul faithfully reveals them in verses 4 through 6 and 8 through 9.

## III. THE CONDITIONS OF PEACE 4:4-6, 8-9a

**Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! Let your forbearing spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your request be made known to God...Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things. The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things;...**

In focusing on the promises made in verses 7 and 9, we left out an important word which both verses have in common. Verse 7 reads, “*And* the peace of God will guard your hearts.” Similarly, verse 9 says: “*And* the God of peace will be with you.” In other words, the promises of God’s peace are dependent upon what had been stated previously, namely a series of commands. The Scripture tells us that we must obey the commands if we want to enjoy the promises.

I have worded these commands as laws. Some of you are familiar with the booklet which begins, “Just as there are physical laws which govern the physical universe, so there are spiritual laws which govern the spiritual universe.” Paul now gives us four laws which are conditions for experiencing the peace of God. The first is the law for relationships.

### A. In Our Relationships—Follow Christ’s Example

In verses 4 and 5, we read: “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! Let your forbearing spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near.” As we have discovered earlier in the book, the essence of the command to rejoice in the Lord is to allow the Lord to be our source of joy. We are to so value Jesus Christ and to so long for the smile of his approval that nothing else matters. In this context, we could never hope to enjoy the peace of God if we give less than first place to him.

But I do not think this is the primary meaning of Paul’s command here. When he tells us to rejoice in the Lord, he urges us to imitate Christ as we wait for his coming. I am sure Paul is remembering the great example of Christ which he gave us in chapter 2. There he said, “I want you to have this attitude which was also in Christ Jesus who gave himself up for our sake.”

He sums up the Lord’s attitude in the beautiful word which is translated “forbearance” or “gentleness,” depending on your version. This word suggests the uncomplaining readiness to accept others as they are and to submit oneself to their demands. It also conveys the idea of a non-defensive attitude. A forbearing person neither asserts his own rights nor insists on his own way. The Lord’s return is imminent, and when he returns all the wrongs will be made right. This confidence enables us to forbear, to be gentle.

Peter devotes an entire chapter to this quality in his first epistle. He says the test of this quality in our lives is found in how we deal with harsh and unreasonable people. Anyone can follow Christ’s example with gentle, kind people. But Peter says, “Servants, be submissive to your masters, not only to those who are gentle but also to those who are unreasonable and obnoxious.” Then he looks at Christ’s example who “uttered no threats and entrusted himself to the Father who judges righteously.”

This is the law for relationships: follow Christ’s example. Apart from this, we will have no peace.

The second law deals with our circumstances.

### B. In Our Circumstances—Pray

The antidote for our circumstances is prayer: “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.” This is a timeless and universal remedy for anxiety. The cure is found in a combined exercise of prayer and thanksgiving. In prayer, our anxiety is resolved by *trusting* God. That which causes our anxiety is brought to the one who is totally competent and in whose hands the matter may be confidently left. In thanksgiving, our anxiety is resolved by the deliberate *acceptance* of our circumstance as that which an all-wise, all-loving, all-sovereign God has appointed.

Our prayer answers the anxiety-provoking question “How can I cope?” by pointing us away from ourselves to God’s resources and promises. Thanksgiving addresses the despair-provoking question “Why is this happening to me?” by pointing us to the One who never acts without purpose and whose purposes never fail.

Prayer has more to do with aligning my heart with God’s purpose than with aligning his heart with mine. Henry Nouwen said:

Prayer is a radical conversion of all our mental processes because in prayer we move away from ourselves, our worries, preoccupation, and self-gratification—and direct all

that we recognize as ours to God in simple trust that through His love all will be made new.

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### The supernatural mark in a Christian’s life is the presence of peace

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For a long time Christians have forced prayer into a role it was never designed to play. We have even made it difficult. If you read too many biographies of fellow saints, you may see prayer as a guilt-producing discipline instead of a guilt-relieving practice. According to this passage, prayer results in peace! But somehow we have bought the idea that in order for prayer to be effective, it has to be painful. And we have to pray continuously for hours—pleading, longing, waiting, hurting. I do not find this in Scripture. Rather than stripping us of our peace, prayer brings it. This is why I like the description of prayer given by a 17th century Frenchman named Francois Fenelon:

Tell God all that is in your heart, as one unloads one’s heart, its pleasures and its pains to a dear friend. Tell Him your troubles, that He may comfort you; tell Him your joys, that He may sober them; tell Him your longings that He may purify them; tell Him your dislikes, that He may help you conquer them; talk to Him of your temptations, that He may shield you from them; show Him the wounds of your heart, that He may heal them; lay bare your indifference to good, your depraved tastes for evil, your instability. Tell him how self-love makes you unjust to others, how vanity tempts you to be insincere, how pride disguises you to yourself and to others.

If you thus pour out all your weaknesses, needs, troubles, there will be no lack of what to say. You will never exhaust the subject. It is continually being renewed. People who have no secrets from each other never want for subjects of conversation. They do not weigh their words, for there is nothing to be held back; neither do they seek for something to say. They talk out of the abundance of the heart; without consideration they say just what they think. Blessed are they who attain to such familiar, unreserved intercourse with God.

This is prayer. When we are anxious, it is much easier to retreat into ourselves and complain. But if we bring the matter to God, then we will find release. This is the law for all our circumstances.

There is a third law which deals with our thoughts.

### C. In Our Thoughts—Discipline Your Mind

Paul tells us to “dwell on these things.” This verb means “to ponder, to give proper weight or value to.” It implies that this appraisal will influence the way we live. Again we are confronted with the importance of our minds. Earlier in the book, Paul said the carnal mind leads to spiritual degeneracy. Now he says the mind drilled on the things God approves leads to practical holiness. If in difficult relationships we allow our minds to be clouded with half-truths or we allow frivolous and damaging thoughts to simmer, then we will never imitate Christ. In contrast to this, the way to peace is found in valuing what is attractive and praiseworthy in others.

We are to meditate on, to prize as valuable and to be influenced by all that is true and all that is honorable. “Honorable” implies those things which merit serious rather than superficial or flippant thoughts. We are to also dwell on all that agrees with justice and purity. “Lovely” describes speak-

ing well of another person, looking for those things which commend them. Finally, we are to look for that which is of genuine worth and merits praise.

What kind of performance would your car deliver if you scooped up a handful of dirt every morning before you left and put it in your crankcase? The fine-tuned engine would quickly be coughing and sputtering. This is true for our lives as well. Thoughts and attitudes about ourselves or others which are narrow, destructive, and abrasive wear on our mental motors. They will eventually drain us of all of our emotional energy and take away all our peace.

In giving attention to the things which God approves, we will allow our minds to become like his. And the promise is that he pledges his guardian peace and his own presence as the God of peace in our lives as a result.

The final law involves our behavior.

#### **D. In Our Behavior—Submit to the Word of God**

We are to submit to the authority of the Word of God: “The things you have learned and heard and seen in me, practice these things.” If we are going to know the presence of the God of peace, then we must certainly seek the life which he approves. Paul himself practiced what he preached (the Philippians watched him). But we no longer have Paul or any

apostle to watch. Thus, this commandment requires us to submit to the apostolic word, the Scriptures.

These are the commandments, the conditions for enjoying the promise of the peace of God. If we as a church are going to stand firm in the face of the world’s opposition, then we must first attend to our own lives, the state of our own hearts and thoughts. If we are going to experience the power of God at work in our inner beings, we must pay attention to these commands. We must model our relationships on Christ, surround our circumstances with prayer, drill our minds in godly thinking, and submit our lives to the Word of God. As Thomas Kelly says:

The life that intends to be wholly obedient, wholly submissive, wholly listening, is astonishing in its completeness. Its joys are ravishing. Its peace profound. Its humility the deepest. Its power world-shaking. Its love enveloping. Its simplicity that of a trusting child.

It is my prayer that we as a body will experience the magnetic charm that is called peace. As a result, perhaps it will be said concerning God’s people in this area: “So the church throughout all the Bay Area enjoyed peace. Being built up, it continued to increase. An irresistible magnet drew people in. Their hunger for holiness kept them close.”

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