

New Life International Fellowship
Philippian Sermon Series (#8)
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March 8, 2020

“What is the pathway to true peace?”
Philippians 4:1-9

Introduction

How important is it to you to be at peace? How much do you long for inner peace? How much do you value relational peace?

Today is the eighth sermon in our sermon series on the book of Philippians. As we move into chapter four, Paul is ready to start to wrap up his letter. But before he’s done, he has something very important to say about how we all could experience more peace in our lives and relationships.

Prayer

Scripture reading: Philippians 4:1-9

Exposition

What is the pathway to true peace?

A. The starting place: “stand firm in this way...” (4:1)

1. Don’t miss the link to 1:27.
 - a. When Paul started his lengthy exhortation, way back in 1:27, he set the tone for the whole letter. It was there that he urged them to exercise their citizenship worthily of the Gospel by standing firm together in unity.
 - b. Now, by returning to the “stand firm” theme, he is saying that everything he taught them about serving humbly and obediently, working together in unity, seeking Christ above all else, and following his example and the examples of Christ, Timothy, and Epaphroditus all goes into standing firm.
2. In other words, you can stand firm...
 - a. by holding fast to your faith in God and Jesus Christ
 - b. by living to know, love, and serve Christ more and more, and
 - c. doing so in harmony with your brothers and sisters in Christ
 - d. Thus, “standing firm” doesn’t mean, “don’t move.” It means, be solid and stable in your faith and relationship with Christ, always ready to move forward with clarity, strength and purpose.

B. Follow the path to relational peace

1. “I urge Euodia and Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord...” (4:2-3).
 - a. Again Paul builds on the theme of thinking “the one” or “the same” thing (See emphasis on mind in 1:7; 1: 9-11; Paul’s example in 1:12-26; 2:5; Jesus’ example in 2:6-8; and explicit teaching in 2:2-4.)
 - b. Paul asks a dear brother, his “true companion” (“Syzyge”) to intervene to help them (4:3).
 - c. The two conflicting women, unable to resolve their differences to this point, are highly esteemed sisters in Christ: they struggled together with Paul in the work of the Gospel; they are considered among Paul’s co-workers; and their names are in the book of life (4:3)
 - d. Conflicts among devoted Christians are as old as the Church itself. Paul does not tell us what they are supposed to think, but they are to agree. No doubt, reflecting on Christ and the Gospel mission would help, as can Syzyge. We are here to help each other, including mentally and spiritually. But as always, the foundation for hope, now and eternally, is God (their names are written in the book of life).
2. “Rejoice in the Lord always!” (4:4)
 - a. There is always cause for rejoicing when we focus on the Lord.
 - b. The more we count our blessings, the more joy we can bring into our relationships (as opposed to crankiness, critical spirits, negativity, etc.)
 - c. Illustration: Sharing consolations before praying at mealtime.
 - d. Point: Rejoicing is a spiritual practice, and needs to become a daily habit.
3. “Let your gentleness (forbearance, consideration) be evident to all. The Lord is near” (4:5).
 - a. What he means by “near” is probably either that the Lord has almost returned or that he is in our midst.
 - b. But the main point is, if we want to have peace and harmony in our relationships, we need to gentle with one another.
 - c. Illustration: Hand signal my family makes when I’m being too intense or harsh. Helpful!

Motivation check: How much do you want relational peace? How much are you willing to work at it? How much are you willing to help a brother or sister find their way to peace when they can’t get there on their own?

C. Follow the path to inner peace (4:6-9)

1. Be anxious for nothing. (That is, “stop worrying so much.”)
2. Instead, in everything, pray.
 - a. By prayer and supplication (petition), let your requests be known to God.
 - supplication means making specific requests
 - prayer, if it is different, may refer to whatever the Spirit prompts us to pray, such as groanings, fears, desire, longing, concern, and the like
 - b. ... with thanksgiving.
 - Why?
 - God wants us to pray with a positive mindset, rooted both in what God has already done through Christ and in our experience up until now, and it is rooted in faith for what we expect God to do. We can pray with thanksgiving, because we have counted our blessings, and because we have hope.

3. The assurance, if we pray positively: the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.
 - a. What does God’s peace guard our hearts and minds from? (the ravages of worry and anxiety? of doubt and fear? other?)

Illustration: Taking my son to the hospital and putting him into the hands of the doctor

4. In general, think positively (4:8-9).
 - a. think (meditate?) on whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, well-spoken of, excellent or praiseworthy.
5. Then, act positively.
 - a. Keep on doing whatever you learned, received, heard and have seen in Paul.
 - b. If you want to have more joy and peace, you need to be intentional about choosing your attitudes and your actions. It’s really your responsibility.
6. The assurance:
 - a. If you think and act positively, imitating your spiritual teachers and models: the God of peace will be with you. Of course we know God is always with us, but it’s also true that many times we can’t feel his presence and we don’t experience his peace.
 - b. In contrast to the eastern meditative tradition, Paul promises peace from focusing on God and the true, beautiful and good, not from removing all thoughts from one’s mind (as peaceful as that might be).
 - c. Peace also comes from living a life that is godly, which is multi-dimensional: prayerful, moral, relational, and committed to Christ and the Gospel mission.

Conclusion

The pathway way to true peace starts with an ever-deepening relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ. Then, it proceeds by way of working for relational peace and by trusting God with every concern, worry, and need. And so, with Paul, I urge you to do the following:

- Stand firm in the Lord.
- Seek relational peace for your relationships by focusing on what you have in common, by being gentle with one another, and by helping others to resolve their conflicts.
- Seek inner peace by making rejoicing a daily habit. Then, replace worry with prayer, positive thinking, and purposeful behavior as spiritual disciplines.

If you do these things, you will find much more peace (and joy) in your life.

Closing Prayer

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Romans 15:13)

For self-reflection and discussion

1. How well are you “standing firm” in your faith and in how you live out your faith in all circumstances?
2. Do you need to make peace with anyone? What could you do to find common ground in the Lord or the Gospel ministry to bring you together? How could you be more gentle with others?
3. How are you helping to bring greater peace among your brothers and sisters?
4. What steps could you take to experience more inner peace, following Paul’s pathway outlined in Philippians 4:6-9?