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Philippians 4:1-9

The Joy and Peace We Desire and Need

Intro

If I were a betting man (which I'm not, don't worry), I would be willing to wager on this statement: **all of our hearts long for peace** - a state of joyful, hopeful, and secure rest. I don't have any polling statistics or peer reviewed data to back up this claim. Nevertheless, if you held up these two choices in front of people: Would you rather have **a.)** a life of *joyful peace*, or **b.)** a life burdened with stress, uncertainty, and nerve-wracking anxiety - I feel confident nearly everyone choose option A: *a life filled with peace rather than anxiety and stress*. Who wouldn't want a life filled with joy and peace, right? And yet, our lives often look like anything *but* peaceful.

We want peaceful relationships with other people. And yet, we all know the *pains and sorrows* that can fill many of our relationships - be it at work, with our neighbors and friends, or in the home and family. If we want to be reminded of this - well, all we have to do is jump on Facebook or Twitter, and be instantly reminded just how *unpeaceful* and *stressful* our interactions with others can be.

None of us like having anxiety, worry, or stress in our lives. And yet, we all have them, at least at some point: financial stress; worrying about important life decisions; the burdens of our loved ones; various forms of sorrows and suffering; we can feel weighed down by the many responsibilities we bear. Ironically, sometimes we create more stress and anxiety for ourselves in the process of trying to relieve it! Many of us *busy ourselves with doing the things that we think will bring us greatest joy and peace*, but in reality, *we're just bringing greater forms of stress and anxiety into our lives* as we try to bear burdens we were never meant to bear; we look to *ourselves* to bring about our greatest joy and peace; but that's something we can never provide.

That is because, most of all, we all *desperately need and long for peace with God* - whether we recognize it or not. Many of the most stressful and anxiety-filled aspects of our lives are the results and symptoms of sin, or misplaced values, or sin-stained desires and affections.

They are constant reminders that we are broken people, and that our greatest need is

redemption, reconciliation, and restoration in Christ Jesus. Reminders that we desperately need the *joy and peace of God that can only be found in Christ.*

That's the reminder we have here in Philippians 4:1-9. This passage shows us that true joy and peace are ours in Christ, as we rest in Him by faith. And the peace we have with God flows out into the rest of our lives and even into our relationships with other people. In verse 1, Paul begins with a solid , **“Therefore,”** meaning that what he is about to say flows out of what he has already told us. He says, **“Therefore... stand firm thus in the Lord.”** When he says **“stand firm,”** he brings us back to the exhortation given in 1;27 - to live out gospel-shaped lives by *standing firm* in the gospel, not only as individuals, but also as a local church. In other words, Paul is saying, “Because of everything I have just told you throughout this letter about living lives transformed by the gospel, **therefore,** here are some *very specific, practical ways this applies to your lives!*” In verses 2-9, Paul makes very specific, even very *pointed* applications.

But before Paul makes these applications, let us note the way he starts; note all of the **affectionate language that Paul prefaces this passage with: “Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.”** These are not the angry rants or overly-cynical comments of some distant, self-righteous elite. No, Paul is making clear that he is addressing these issues and making pointed applications *because of how much he loves them! His desire is to see them continue to stand firm in the gospel; to flourish as a healthy church; to see each individual grow in Christ and for the church as a whole to display the gospel in their selfless unity!* And therefore, this is God's desire for us through this text this morning, as well!

So first, we see here ***the problem to be addressed*** - *disunity that has broken out in the local church of Philippi.* And then, Paul shows us that our *peace with each other* flows out of *each individual Christian and church member rooting their joy in the Lord and, through faith, experiencing the true peace of God in their lives.*

I. The Need for Peace - We are Called to Live in Unity with One Another (vv.1-3)

In verses 2-3, we're given a glimpse into what was going on in the Philippian church: we see here that there were two women in the church, named Euodia and Synteche, who were in open disagreement with each other, to the point that it became a threat to church unity. We don't

know much about this situation or what the argument was about. But what we *do know* is that they were prominent church members, that their disagreement and quarreling was visible and public, and that Paul is *very confident* that these two women are true believers. He reminds everyone how these women served alongside him in advancing the gospel, and then makes a bold, confident assertion: their ***“names are in the book of life.”*** This is strong, biblical language meaning that their salvation and eternal life in Christ is sure and certain. Paul is saying he has the utmost confidence that they are truly believers!

And yet, what he’s implying here, is that they’re not acting like it in their relationship with each other. So Paul appeals to other believers around them to step in and help them to ***“agree in the Lord.”*** We’re not exactly sure who the “true companion” of verse 3 is, or whether or not “Clement” is someone there in Philippi. It’s possible Paul is appealing to the leadership of the church or a specific person; it’s also possible that Paul is appealing to the church as a whole, or to each individual church member to step in and help these women agree and have unity in the Lord. Either way, Paul *is* bringing other believers into it, asking them to step in and intervene. He’s making this exhortation in a letter that would be read publicly to the whole church, where Euodia and Synteche themselves would be in the audience! He’s asking other believers and church members there, whether the whole church or specific pastors or leaders, to step in and address this.

Now, why, we might ask, would Paul address this publicly and get the rest of the church involved? What’s the big deal? I think the answer is because *our unity with one another, or lack thereof, directly displays, or hurts, a gospel witness; furthermore; our church unity or disunity directly **builds up or tears down** our fellow believers and the congregation as a whole.* As we saw last week; each Christian is in a race, to cling to Christ in faith and grow in Him, persevering to the end, when we enter into the fullness of salvation and eternal life! But we also saw that *this race is not a solitary race; we run together, and we need each other, as fellow believers and church members, to help each other cross the finish line! We **stand firm together!** But only if we stand *unified!* Threats to church unity are always taken very seriously in the Bible. **Disunity** threatens our **perseverance** as a church, weakening us and making us vulnerable to sin, the blows of persecution, and outright falling apart until the church dies off. **Disunity** also threatens our **gospel witness**, strangling our efforts to see the gospel advance.*

Just like in the early church, we, too, are **tempted to let our disagreements turn into bitterness, or outright fights and scandalous feuds**; this happens in churches even today. We've all seen tiny disagreements blow up out of proportion; we've all seen members fight and walk away from the church; we've all seen churches split down the middle, sometimes over unbiblical reasons. Even among healthy believers this can still come up as a problem! Personalities clash; misunderstandings happen; pride rears its ugly head. So we, too, must be on guard for this! We too must strive for selfless, humble unity with one another, not grumbling and arguing, but dying to ourselves and following after the example of Christ! Whether we're right or wrong, it doesn't matter; the gospel compels us to seek to be *at peace* with each other; if this will be displayed anywhere, *then it should be in the local church, of all places!*

So how do we deal with this when it comes up? What should be our goal as we seek **unity** even as we **legitimately disagree with each other**? The goal Paul gives here is to ***“agree in the Lord.”***

What does that mean? That we have to agree on everything? No, I don't think that's what it means.. If there were a clear right and wrong answer for Euodia and Synteché's argument, then it seems reasonable that Paul would have addressed it; for example, he does this in other letters when *wrong, heretical teaching* or *clear sins* are involved. Instead, here he seems to be saying they are to set aside their disagreements and have loving, peaceful unity with each other **by focusing on their commonality and agreement in the gospel of Jesus Christ!**

We can tend to think that **unity** means *everyone must agree all the time!* But if we think that way, *we're destined for disaster*. There are **things we must agree on**: these are the *essentials of our faith!* It is this common ground we focus on, and strive for unity with one another **because of our common faith in Christ and belief in God's Holy Word!** But there are also things that ***we can disagree on as Christians, even as fellow church members!***

This has been helpfully referred to as “Theological Triage.” YOU can think of medical triage, where patients are prioritized according to the seriousness of their wounds. The most important things are **the essentials of our faith; the things we all must agree on to be believers - such as the gospel of Christ, the Trinity, the inerrancy of Scripture, and so on.** The second level contains the things that are *not essential for salvation* but are still *very important and must be agreed upon to do church together* - **baptism** for instance. But the third level contains things that we, as Christians, are free to disagree on, assuming we are still basing

our views and actions upon the Word of God. This includes having different interpretations of less clear portions of scripture. It also includes areas of Christian liberty, or wisdom issues. We might disagree on the best ways to approach politics, the best way to use our resources as a church, or the wisdom of making certain decisions as a family. Yes, we can have conversations about such things with each other and hope to encourage and grow each other in the Lord. **But we must always do so with humility and selfless love; and we must be willing to disagree and display the gospel through disagreeing in a very humble, loving, unifying way!** We do this by *emphasizing Christian liberty* and by **emphasizing all that we do agree on in Christ!**

But even this can be hard at times, can't it? That's why Paul moves next to the *peace each individual must have with God before we can have peace with each other...*

II. The Peace We Need - We Need the Peace and Joy that Only comes from God (vv. 4-7)

Our peaceful unity with one another must flow out of the **peace of God** each individual Christian, *each one of us*, knows and experiences in Christ - *the peace we are to have, deep in our souls, as we rest in Christ by faith*. First, we must have *peace* between ourselves and God; when we do, the *peace and joy of God* fill us, guarding our hearts and minds from anxiety, enabling us to deal with one another selfless love and humility, **“letting our reasonableness,” or gentless, “be known to everyone.”** When we are **at peace with God in Christ**, we grow to experience this **joyful peace** in *our hearts and minds*, and as we do so, this peace flows out into our lives and relationships with others.

That's what we see in verses 4-7: the answer to the implied questions: *“What is the solution to Eudoia and Syntyche getting along and having peaceful unity once more? What is the solution to stressful spats and squabbles and quarreling with each other? Better yet, what is the solution to being free of all of these stresses, anxieties, and burdensome worries that we carry, weighing us down until we're so strained that we're at each other's throats? What is the solution to our cynical grumbling, complaining, and arguing?”*

The only true, lasting solution is to *look to the Lord in faith*, rooting our joy not in anything else but Christ, and experiencing *true peace* in Christ by *faith* as we rest in His presence

and promises. The **joyful peace of God** is the *antidote* to the poison of *anxiety, bitterness, and division in our hearts*.

Therefore, we're commanded to **rejoice in the Lord!** It's even repeated a second time! Now this might seem like an odd command: do we really need to be *commanded* to rejoice? Furthermore, do we have a choice in the matter? When Paul uses the word **joy** this doesn't refer to the fleeting, temporary emotions we feel when we are happy and cheerful, and everything is going our way. There is nothing wrong with those emotions; those are great things! But they are not sustainable. No, this joy is *the lasting, sustainable joy that we have in Christ!* Paul brings up *joy over and over again* in this letter (Phil. 1:3, 18, 15; 2:2, 17-18, 28-29; 3:1; 4:1, 10); everytime, it refers to the lasting, abounding joy that flows out of our faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ, the sure hope we and experience in Him, and the work that He is doing in and through us and our fellow Christians. The command is for us to *firmly root* our joy - that which we long for, hope in, and find contentment and satisfaction in - we are to root our joy *most firmly in Jesus Christ and the glorious promises of the gospel!* When we cling to Christ in faith, beholding His promises and trusting in them, remembering the glorious blessings of salvation we receive purely by grace through faith - when we set our hearts on this, *then we have every reason to rejoice!* *We have great joy in Christ, no matter what our circumstances in life are!* In suffering, in persecution, in sorrow, even amidst sin and strife - there is still always *joy* for those of us who trust in Christ.

Yet when stressful concerns and anxieties come into our life, they *threaten and attack our Christian joy* - and we must recognize this as an attack on our *faith*. That is why we are commanded next **"not to be anxious about anything."** Anxiety is the *antithesis of faith* - *it is the opposite, the enemy, of faith!* When worries come and we stress out about them, becoming overwhelmed with anxiety, this often reveals that we're *not* trusting the Lord with these things - we're trying to bear the burdens ourselves, trusting in *ourselves* - yet we quickly realize that *we're not up for the task! We can't bear these burdens, and neither can the other people in our lives!* This is why we're so anxious! This is why we grumble and complain, why we argue and fight!

So then, what do we do? How do we turn away from anxiety, turn to the Lord in faith, and experience His joyful peace instead? ***We bring our worries, anxieties and burdens to the Lord.*** When we bring our requests to God in prayer, *this is putting our faith into practice; this is*

the humbling act of saying, “Lord, I can’t bear these burdens, but I know you can; I don’t want to trust in myself anymore, I want to trust in you and rest in your promises!”

So very practically, here are some steps we can take when we feel overwhelmed by our burdens and are feeling anxious:

1. First, recognize that your deepest need and desire is *actually* to experience the **joy and peace of God**, that only He can provide, for only He can bear your burdens.
2. Secondly, *go to the Lord in prayer, having faith that “the Lord is at Hand”* - God is with you; He loves you and is calling you to come bring your burdens to Him.
3. THird, **root your joy in Christ - rejoice in the Lord - by remembering His promises, believing in them, and giving thanks to God for every good thing, every blessing and grace, in your life! Give thanks to Him for all the things He is doing in and through you! Remember the glorious good news of the gospel** - we are sinners, we deserve death and the wrath of God, and yet *he sent Christ to live, die, and be raised in our place! We trust in Him believing that we are completely forgiven, declared righteous, are being made holy, and will surely be raised to eternal life in Christ!* No matter what else is going on in our lives, we should *always be grateful for the gospel and rejoice in it!* No matter our other needs, our *deepest need* has already been met in Christ Jesus! This gives us **perspective** on the other worries and burdens in our life, doesn’t it? THIS is the fundamental posture of faith; we deal with our burdens and anxieties by first resting in the gospel, rejoicing in Christ and giving thanks to the Lord in worship and praise.
But, there are still legitimate concerns to be dealt with in our life. **Joyful, grateful faith** gives us perspective; it doesn’t downplay or minimize the concerns of our lives, but it does put us in the right *mindset* to bring to them to the Lord and deal with them.
4. Fourth, then, is to **bear your soul to God!** Whatever troubles your spirit; whatever burdens your heart; whatever keeps you up at night, whatever tempts you to be anxious - *bring it to the Lord in prayer! Cast your anxiety at His feet!*

5. And then, finally - *rest in Him by faith!* Truly **believe His promises to lovingly care and provide for you! Cast off your burdens and let the Lord take care of them! Let Him bear our burdens! He has promised to provide for us, to work out all things in our lives for our good and His glory! He promises to hear and answer our prayers in the way that is truly best for us!** So trust in Him

And when we do, *the peace of God, that surpaasses all understanding, guards our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus!* That's what we're told here in verses 4-7: to **rest in the Lord by faith, and experience the true Joy and Peace of God that you so desperately desire and need!**

[**Transition:**] But, this can be difficult to grasp with our hearts at times; so, *we all need to cultivate lives that shape our hearts and minds to rest in the joy and peace more and more.* This leads us to point number 3:

III. The Life of Peace - Let us *think about* and *live out* the Truth, Godness, Beauty, and Righteousness of God in All Things (vv. 8-9)

In verses 8-9, Paul exhorts us to cultivate a *lifestyle* of **meditating on and living out** anything that *reflects* and *points us back to* the **Truth, Goodness, Love, Beauty, and Righteousness of God.** As we dwell on these good things, and as they capture our hearts, minds, and imaginations, this helps to shape our thoughts, desires, emotions, and actions to *increasingly trust the Lord, walk in His ways, and experience the joyful peace of God in our lives.*

We are to set our eyes, our minds, and our hearts *firmly on the things of the Lord, not of this world.* That is what we are to think about, to dwell on, and to imitate. And Paul says repeatedly “*whatever*” or “*anything*” that is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, etc. That is, **wherever it comes from, wherever we find it, whether in the natural world, the things that Christians or non-Christians produce, or even in the lives of our fellow church members:** does it reflect the standards of God? Then embrace it! All Truth is God's Truth. All that is truly Good, Righteous, Loving, and Beautiful comes from and points us to Him.

But in order to do this well requires **discernment.** We first must know what God's Truth, Love, Goodness, Beauty and Righteousness are! And we learn this *from the Bible.* So first, we must constantly seek to *renew our minds in the Scriptures.* This is where we receive the proper **lenses, or glasses,** through which we properly see Truth, Love, Goodness, and Beauty. So we

start by rooting ourselves in the Word of God. And then we ask, “Is there anything that helps me understand God’s Word better and live it out?” If so, then embrace it whole-heartedly! Coming to church, fellowshiping with fellow believers, reading books on the Bible, theology, and devotional practices - we should build such things into our lives as they help set our heart and minds on Christ and His Word!

And as we mature in these things, with the proper *glasses* through which we can rightly see the World, we can find God’s Truth, Goodness, and Beauty in all sorts of places!

[Application]: Here is what all of this means for us practically: There are a million voices always seeking to influence us; a million things fighting for our hearts, minds, and imaginations. Movies, books, social media, music, poetry, art, culture, politics, our friends and family, advertisements - these and more are seeking to influence us, to grab hold of and reshape our hearts and minds. We need to be aware of this and to *rightly discern all of these things through the lenses of Scripture*. We ask: **“How does this match up with God’s Truth?”** Inasmuch as it does, use it! Where it doesn’t, reject it! **“Is what I’m hearing, watching, or reading honorable, just, pure, and commendable? Does it help form my thoughts, emotions, and desires to think and want the right things?”** If so, use it! If not, reject it! **“Does this present a true form of godly beauty, leading me to worship and praise God? Or does it pervert and twist true beauty?”** *These are the kinds of discerning questions we must be asking about the things we let influence us.* We might come to different decisions on what we watch, listen to, or read; there is room for variation when it comes to such wisdom and discernment. But **all of us must make an effort to cultivate a life that helps us set our hearts and minds on Christ, rather than hindering us from trusting in and obeying Him. And when we cultivate such lives, walking with the Lord by faith, He is with us, and we experience God’s peace.**

So then, my beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ, let us **stand firm in the Lord**, as individuals, by **firmly rooting our joy in Christ, trusting in Him and experiencing His peace** - the **Peace of God that surpasses all understanding, that takes away the burdens of our stress and anxiety, and that comforts our souls, that guards our minds in the sure knowledge of His promises, and guards our hearts in the comfort of His presence.** Let us **build our lives** around the pursuit of fixing our hearts and minds on Him! Let us **think about and meditate on** anything that helps us trust in Him more and experience the **joy and peace of**

Christ in our lives! Let us discard anything that **sets our hearts and minds on sin** and makes it harder for us to **trust and obey God**. And let us **stand firm together**; let the peace of God in each of us *overflow into our lives and relationships with each other!* Let our **loving, selfless unity** be a visible picture of the **joy and peace of God we have in Christ!**

And if you're not a believer this morning: all of those burdens you're carrying; the stresses and worries of life weighing you down, making you anxious; you can't bear them all. And they are *signs for you* that your deepest problem, your deepest worry and anxiety, is your **sin**. Every burden in our life is a result, in some or another, from sin; either ours or someone else's. And they all remind us that *our deepest problem* is that we are sinners who deserve **death and the eternal wrath of God**. But there is hope for you! There is joy and peace for you **in Christ!** Turn to the Lord and *trust in Him!* Cry out to Him in faith! Bring the burdens of your heart, the burdens of your sins to the Lord; believing that Jesus Christ lived, died, and rose again *to deal with the burdens of your sins on the cross!* Trust in Christ and know the **peace of God** in your soul!