

**Philippians 4: 4-7**—“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! <sup>5</sup>Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. <sup>6</sup>Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. <sup>7</sup>And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

### **Background/Introduction:**

- In Philippians 4:1-9 the key statement is "stand firm in the Lord."
  - That means be spiritually stable, don't be like those who are tossed to and fro and carried about by every wind of doctrine. Be firm, be strong, be stable in the Lord. Example...
    - **Psalm 1** “Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. <sup>2</sup> But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. <sup>3</sup> He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers. <sup>4</sup> Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away. <sup>5</sup> Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. <sup>6</sup> For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.”
  - But how are we to develop spiritual stability? That's the little word "so," thus or in this way stand firm in the Lord, here's how, I'm going to tell you how.
  - Last week I said that Paul provides an outline of who to develop spiritual stability. That is, how the command to “stand firm” was to be lived out.
1. **We stand firm by maintaining or cultivating peace within the local church.**
  2. **We stand firm by always rejoicing.**
    - Why is rejoicing so important?
    - **Motyer:** “Nowhere does the self-centered heart of man more quickly take control than through the machinery of criticism and the prompting of self-interest.”<sup>1</sup>
    - **Desiring God:** “Consider the relationship between boasting and self-pity. Both are manifestations of pride. Boasting is the response of pride to success. Self-pity is the response of pride to suffering. Boasting says, ‘I deserve admiration because I have achieved so much.’ Self-pity says, ‘I deserve admiration because I have sacrificed so much.’ Boasting is the voice of pride in the heart of the strong. Self-pity is the voice of pride in the heart of the weak. Boasting sounds self-sufficient. Self-pity sounds self-sacrificing. The reason self-pity does not look like pride is that it appears to be needy. But the need arises from a wounded ego and the desire of the self-pitying is not really for others to see them as helpless, but heroes. The need self-pity feels does not come from a sense of unworthiness, but from a sense of unrecognized worthiness. It is the response of unapplauded pride.”<sup>2</sup>

### **<sup>4</sup>“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!**

- **J.A. Motyer:** “Glorying in Christ Jesus was the central feature of the religion of the covenant people of God (3:3), and this was but another way of saying ‘Rejoice in the Lord’ (3:1). The

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<sup>1</sup> J. A. Motyer, *The Message of Philippians* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1984), 210.

<sup>2</sup> John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist* (Portland: Multnomah, 1986), p. 222. As quoted in Future Grace.

essence of the matter is so to value Jesus Christ, and so to long for the smile of his approval, that nothing else matters.”<sup>3</sup> (210)

- We must keep in mind the context of the passage.
    - Euodia and Syntyche have been disputing so strongly that it has affected the entire church. In verses 3 & 4 Paul has told them to agree in the Lord and that the “yoke fellow” (possibly the congregation) was to help them work things out. It is this setting that Paul says...
- 3. We stand firm by learning to accept less than we might think were due.**

**<sup>5</sup>Let your gentleness (*epieikes*) be evident to all.**

- Public success of the church along the front where it faces the world depends upon the measure of sanctification of each individual Christian.
- As ‘gentle forbearance’ (*epieikes*), the uncomplaining readiness to accept others as they are and to submit oneself to their demands.
- **1 Thessalonians 2:6-7** “As apostles of Christ we could have been a burden to you, <sup>7</sup>but we were gentle (*epieikes*) among you, like a mother caring for her little children.”
- It could read, "Let your contentment be known to all men."
- In fact, for almost every translation of this text there is probably a different word used here because this is one of those almost untranslatable Greek terms...epieikes.
- For example, it has the sense of sweet reasonableness, that you are...you are responsive to an appeal, that there's a gentleness about you when someone asks you something, you're sweetly reasonable about it.
- It also could be translated big heartedness. Not only are you sweetly reasonable but it goes beyond that, you are very generous.
- Another possible term is graciousness.
- It is the graciousness of humility which basically says you may have offended me, you may have mistreated me, you may have misjudged me, worse than that you may have misrepresented me, you may have maltreated me, you may have not given me what I deserve, you may have given me what I do not deserve, you may have ruined my reputation with some, you may have acted in hostility against me unjustly, I may the recipient of your inequity, injustice and mistreatment, but I humbly and graciously accept it. That's what it means.
- The reason is then given as to why they should be gentle/forbearing to all because...

**The Lord is near.**

**4. We stand firm by resting on a confident faith in the Lord.**

- The term "near," engus, can mean near in space or near in time, just like the word near can be near in space or time.
  - I could say that pew is near, that's near in space.
  - I could say Monday is near, that's near in time.
- Now what is the result of knowing the Lord is near? Be anxious for what? Nothing. What am I going to be worrying about?
- There is an important assumption in this passage.

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<sup>3</sup> J. A. Motyer, *The Message of Philippians* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1984), 210.

- The assumption is that you are so familiar with who God is that when you're told "the Lord is near" you realize that there is nothing that you need to be anxious about. But herein is our problem.
- **Tozer:** "The Church has surrendered her once lofty concept of God and has substituted for it one so low, so ignoble, as to be utterly unworthy of thinking, worshiping men. This she has done not deliberately, but little by little and without her knowledge; and her very unawareness only makes her situation all the more tragic."<sup>4</sup>
- **A.W. Pink:** "So few today are accustomed to meditate upon the personal perfections of God."<sup>5</sup>
- **Pink:** "The sovereignty of God. What do we mean by this expression? We mean the supremacy of God, the kingship of God, the godhood of God... To say that God is sovereign is to declare that He is the Most High, doing according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth, so that none can stay His hand or say unto Him "what doest Thou?" (Dan. 4:35). To say that God is sovereign is to declare that He is the Almighty, the Possessor of all power in heaven and earth, so that *none can defeat His counsels, thwart His purposes, or resist His will* (Ps. 115:3). To say that God is sovereign is to declare that He is "The Governor among the nations" (Ps 22:28), setting up kingdoms, overthrowing empires, and *determining the course of dynasties as pleaseth Him best*... Such is the God of the Bible."<sup>6</sup>
- No wonder people have guilt, fear and anxiety. They have an inadequate knowledge of God and an inadequate trust in God. If you imagine God to be other than He is... that's an idol.
- That is why Luther said to Erasmus: "Your thoughts of God are too human."<sup>7</sup>
- ***Gleanings in the Godhead***, "The God of this century no more resembles the sovereign of holy writ than does the dim flickering of a candle resemble the glory of the mid day sun. The God who is talked about in the average pulpit, spoken of in the ordinary Sunday-school class and mentioned ... a figment of human imagination and invention of maudlin sentimentality."<sup>8</sup>
- This is why we must preach the gospel to ourselves everyday. We must remind ourselves of who God is and the work that Christ has done. Only then will we be able to be...

**<sup>6</sup>Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition,**

- None of this should be misconstrued as a Pollyanish approach to life. Christians are not ostriches with heads carefully buried in the sand. None of this means that our paths will be smooth... There is no hint that we shall live above the pressures of other mortals by escaping them.

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<sup>4</sup> A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, (Harper & Row, San Francisco, 1961), vii.

<sup>5</sup> A. W. Pink, *The Attributes of God*, (Baker: Grand Rapids, 1975), 9.

<sup>6</sup> A. W. Pink, *The Sovereignty of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1930), 19.

<sup>7</sup> Martin Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian* as found in *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, ed. Timothy Lull (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 87.

<sup>8</sup> A.W. Pink, *Gleanings in the Godhead*, as quoted in John MacArthur, "Spiritual Stability, Part 3, Philipians 4:5-6,"

<http://www.gty.org/resources.php?section=transcripts&aid=216574>.

- If you worry little simply because Providence has so far blessed you with a relatively easy passage or if you worry little because you have a carefree personality, you know little of the truth of this passage. Their passage does not deny the existence of anxieties, it tells us what to do with them.

**with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.**

- In thanksgiving, anxiety is resolved by the deliberate acceptance of the worrying circumstance as something which an all-wise, all-loving and all-sovereign God has appointed.
- This, surely, is what is elsewhere called “a sacrifice of praise” (Heb. 13:15). Anyone can offer praise when things are going well.

Other Than Mine  
Catherine A. Miller

I would have chosen a sunlit path,  
All strewn with roses fair,  
With never a cloud to darken my way,  
Nor a shade of anxious care.  
But He chose for me a better way-  
Not sunshine or roses sweet,  
But clouds o'erhead, and thorns below  
That cut and hurt my feet.  
I have deep joys of another kind,  
My Rose of Sharon is He  
And as for sunshine-His lovely face  
Is perfect sunshine to me.

I would have chosen my life to be  
Active, tireless and strong;  
A constant, ceaseless working for Him,  
Amid the needy throng.  
But He chose for me a better lot-  
A life of frequent pain,  
Of strength withheld when needed most,  
And loss instead of gain.  
He gave me work of another kind,  
Far, far above my thought,  
The work of interceding with Him,  
For souls that He had bought.

'Tis far, far better to let Him choose  
The way that we should take,  
If only we leave our life with Him  
He will guide without mistake.  
We, in our blindness, would never choose

A pathway dark and rough,  
 And so we would never find in Him,  
 "The God who is enough."  
 In disappointment, trouble and pain  
 We turn to the changeless One,  
 And prove how faithful, loving and wise  
 Is God's beloved Son.

**<sup>7</sup>And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding,**

- A most important word: *and*
- This is not some bit of clever psychology.
- This must not be reduced to just a clever suggestion or escapist comfort.
- Detached from its New Testament content, the word 'peace' is a sort of spiritual marshmallow, full of softness and sweetness but without much actual substance.
- We must be careful, in stressing the inner effectiveness of this guardian peace, not to limit it to the realm of peaceful feelings. The New Testament idea of 'peace' takes its origin in the Old Testament where 'peace' (shalom) possesses the root meaning of 'wholeness'.
- Peace that passes all understanding: The meaning here is not of something mysterious and incomprehensible in its own right, but of something which man cannot explain or explain away; something which runs beyond the range of human comprehension.
- What we need today is the touch of the supernatural, something that cannot be explained except by saying, 'This is the finger of God.'
- It is also a relational word including (upward)'peace with God' and (outward) peaceful integration within the society of God's people.
- **Motyer:** "It would, therefore, be an unnatural constriction of Paul's thinking to understand him as offering, say to Euodia and Syntyche, a peace powerful enough to master anxiety but impotent to mend their broken relationship, or to imagine him inviting them to lay hold of God's strong peace only as an interior fortress and not also as an antidote to their ill-feeling towards each other."<sup>9</sup>

**will guard (*phroureo*) your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."**

- ...That our hearts and minds will be garrisoned by the peace of God. This is not The heart in this sense has the inner source and spring of life.
- There is the need of a garrison (for this is the meaning of the word *guard*) around *hearts and minds*.
- The mind is the outflow from this source in terms of definite plans which we entertain.
- The need for the conscious presence of God: *The God of peace will be with you.*<sup>10</sup>

**Application:**

- **We must deal with our anxiety appropriately--Pray:** There is a sense in which our society demands that we worry on a broader scale than any society in the history of the human race. If we were to travel back in time eight hundred years or so, we would discover that most people in Europe worried about nothing more than local matters. Of course, those local matters could be severe: medical help was not impressive; most families lost one or more

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<sup>9</sup> Motyer, 209.

<sup>10</sup> Philippians 4:9.

children; life could be harsh, brutal, and short. Most people gave little thought to what people were doing in the next county, let alone the next country or the next continent.

- So our advances in communications demand that we worry about peace, economics, famine in the Sahel, enormous disparities of wealth in Latin America and the Philippines, cultural decline, the breakup of the Soviet empire, civil conflict in the Balkans, genocide in Rwanda, and on and on.
- Our worries are not limited to international affairs.
- Then, of course, we can add in the regular parade of pressures: car troubles, conflict with colleagues at work, impending...
- We hear this command not to worry—perhaps at a conference or in a book—and we smile piously, grit our teeth, resolve not to worry, and promptly begin to worry about not worrying.
- Scripture here tells us how to overcome our anxieties. “Do not be anxious about anything” is not a naked prohibition; the alternative is immediately provided:
- “When was the last time you prayed explicitly and at length over the things that worry you, trouble you, plague you? Did you take them out and recount them to God, one by one, laying your burdens on him?” (112)
- Our lives are so rushed that we begrudge a three-minute “quiet time,” and then we wonder where God is. Yet the psalmist had it right: “He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, ‘He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust’” (Ps. 91:1-2).
- “Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7).
- **J. A. Bengel** was right to insist that “Anxiety and genuine prayer are more opposed to each other than fire and water. I have yet to meet a chronic worrier who enjoys an excellent prayer life.”
- Resolve not to be anxious about anything, but learn instead to pray. Nothing will prove so effective in strengthening your spiritual stamina, in giving you grace never to give up the Christian walk.

*God Moves in a Mysterious Way*  
William Cowper

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;  
The clouds ye so much dread  
Are big with mercy, and shall break  
In blessings on your head.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,  
But trust him for his grace;  
Behind a frowning providence  
He hides a smiling face.

His purposes will ripen fast,  
Unfolding every hour;  
The bud may have a bitter taste,  
But sweet will be the flower.

Blind unbelief is sure to err,  
 And scan his work in vain;  
 God is his own interpreter,  
 And he will make it plain.

**Dealing with Anxiety appropriately will also mean controlling our thoughts.**

- This is precisely the point that Paul will make next (next week).
- Just as a man must control his thoughts so as to keep them pure, so all people must control their thoughts when it comes to anxiety.
- It always makes me fearful to remember that God knows my thoughts. Hebrews 4:13 reminds us, “Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight.”
- **Carson:** “The real measure of individuals lies in what they think—not in what they own or in how well they deploy their gifts or even in what they do, but in what they think. If you think holy thoughts, you will be holy; if you think garbage, you will be garbage.”<sup>11</sup>
- David recognized not only that God knew his thoughts, but that any real reform in his life *must begin with his thoughts*.
- “Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts” (Is. 55:7).
- “Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth” (John 17:17).
- There is no enduring sanctification apart from the truth of the gospel taking hold of our minds.
- One of the sovereign remedies against sin is to spend much time, thoughtful time, meditative time, in the Scriptures.
- I know it is possible for people to gain a sort of mechanical knowledge of Scripture, however...

**Beware The Debtors Ethic:**

- There is a caution about gratitude however. Gratitude will always degenerate into the debtor’s ethic if it only looks back on past grace and not forward as well to future grace...gratitude functions well as a motive only as it gives rise to faith. Gratitude says to faith, ‘Keep trusting your Father for more grace; I know He will supply. I have experienced it, and it was sweet.’<sup>12</sup>
- The Bible rarely, if ever, explicitly makes gratitude the impulse of moral behavior, or ingratitude the explanation of immorality.<sup>13</sup>
- the point of the gospel is not us serving God but God coming to our aid.
  - **Acts 17:24-25**—“<sup>24</sup>The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. <sup>25</sup>And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else.”
  - **The Pleasures of God:** “God has no needs that I could ever be required to satisfy. God has no deficiencies that I might be required to supply. He is complete in himself. He is overflowing with happiness in the fellowship of the Trinity. The upshot of this is that God is a mountain spring, not a watering trough. A mountain spring is self-replenishing. It constantly overflows and supplies others. But a watering trough

<sup>11</sup> D.A. Carson, *Basics for Believers: An Exposition of Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 115.

<sup>12</sup> Piper, Brothers...38.

<sup>13</sup> Piper, 34.

- needs to be filled with a pump or bucket brigade. So if you want to glorify the worth of a watering trough you work hard to keep it full and useful. But if you want to glorify the worth of a spring you do it by getting down on your hands and knees and dirking to your heart's satisfaction, until you have the refreshment and strength to go back down in the valley and tell people what you've found. You do not glorify a mountain spring by dutifully hauling water up the path from the river below and dumping it in the spring...the way to *please* God is to come to him to get and not to give, to drink and not to water. He is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him...God is the kind of God who will be pleased with the one thing I have to offer—my thirst.”<sup>14</sup>
- ***Psalms 50: 9-10, 12***—“I have no need of a bull from your stall...<sup>10</sup>for every animal of the forest is mine...<sup>12</sup>If I were hungry I would not tell you, for the world is mine, and all that is in it.”
  - But isn't there something we can give to God that won't belittle Him to the status of beneficiary?
    - Yes. Our anxieties. It's a command: “Cast all your anxieties on him” (1 Pet. 5:7).
    - God will gladly receive anything from us that shows our dependence and His all sufficiency.”
- But, are we not to serve God?
    - Compare serving money and serving God
      - How does a person serve money? He does not assist money. He is not the benefactor of money. How then do we serve money? Money exerts a certain control over us because it seems to hold out so much promise of happiness. It whispers with great force, “Think and act so as to get into a position to enjoy my benefits.” We serve it by believing the promise and living by that faith. So *we don't serve money by putting our power at its disposal for its good. We serve money by doing what is necessary so that Money's power will be at our disposal for our good.*”<sup>15</sup>
  - ***Sinclair Ferguson***: “The glory of the gospel is that God has declared Christians to be rightly related to him in spite of their sin. *But our greatest temptation and mistake is to try to smuggle character into his work of grace.* How easily we fall into the trap of assuming that we only remain justified so long as there are grounds in our character for that justification. But Paul's teaching is that nothing we do ever contributes to our justification.”<sup>16</sup>
  - ***1 Peter 4:11*** “If anyone serves, *he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ.* To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.”
  - ***Piper***: “What is God looking for in the world? Assistants? No. The gospel is not a help-wanted ad. It is a help-available ad. God is not looking for people to work for Him but people who let Him work mightily in and through them.”<sup>17</sup>

<sup>14</sup> John Piper, *The Pleasures of God* (Sisters: Multnomah, 2000), 208-209.

<sup>15</sup> John Piper, *Brothers We are Not Professionals* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2002), p. 43.

<sup>16</sup> Sinclair Ferguson, *The Christian Life: A Doctrinal Introduction* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1989), p. 82-83.

<sup>17</sup> Piper, *Brothers*...p. 40.

