

Philippians Chapter four – Study Notes

Chapter 4: 1-3.

Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends! ² I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. ³ Yes, and I ask you, my true companion, help these women since they have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.

At the beginning of Chapter four Paul continues with his praise for a church that he is very attached to. “My joy and my crown” - he calls them. Paul regularly includes encouragement to the churches in his letters. We continue to get the sense that Paul had a unique friendship with this community. In 4:10-20 - we see how they chose to partner in his ministry at a level that no other church did.

However, they were by no means perfect. They were facing a number of challenges, so Paul encourages them to “stand firm in the Lord”. Paul did have to address some kind of friction in the church between two prominent members, two women, Euodia and Syntyche. This was not just a personal niggle but was affecting the whole church. Paul calls them “co-workers” who have been at Paul’s side in his Gospel mission and by mentioning the book of life is a way of acknowledging the mana and sacrifice of these women. They certainly had some stature in this church.

They seem to have been having opposing views on something and were engaged in an argument over it, perhaps it was dividing the church. So Paul asks someone that he calls, “My true companion” (verse 3). Whatever the issue was, Paul is “pleading” with these two calling them to unity not division. He does not take sides but reminds them of the big picture that they have been part of “the cause of the Gospel”.

He does not ask them to give into each other. He urges them to move closer together. Why? For the sake of Gospel unity in mission. He is not asking them to cave in and give in. He’s asking them to put the mission above whatever is separating them. He commends and reminds them of the Gospel mission history they have together and knows that disunity weakens the battle for the Gospel.

So, how does Paul go about reconciliation? He doesn’t suggest a special protocol or policy. It’s more about challenging the attitude that each person has to one another. These few verses from Paul can help us when we face conflict or disagreements with each other. The key is the *Will to come Together*. Reconciliation can only happen when both sides agree to come together.

Coming together is not necessarily about admitting fault. It is not about immediately forgiving and forgetting the wrong the other has done. Simply a humble desire to open

a path forward. An alternative is avoidance and rejection, hurt and pain. Paul addresses both women equally. He isn't presuming which one will take the first step. I like how Nija Gupta expresses this, **"He turns to each person and warmly invites them to the table of conversation"** (N. Gupta, Reading Philipians, A Theological introduction).

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

Now we know that the church was suffering from persecution. The word gentleness here, in the original Greek was often used to describe an attitude of kindness where the normal or expected response was retaliation. In other words, he is saying don't retaliate to those persecuting you. Be gentle. The word anxious in the Greek is often used in contexts where persecution is the issue. It seems Paul is referring back to Chapter one 27- 30.

²⁷ Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel ²⁸ without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God. ²⁹ For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him, ³⁰ since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.

In verse 4, we have this call from Paul to rejoice in the Lord. The thing about suffering and persecution is that it can dampen joy and prompt a vengeful response. The way in which he phrases this he did not intend to limit the application of joy just to this setting. This is guide for us today. We should have a default setting of Joy and gain a reputation for offering gentleness rather than vengeful retaliation.

Paul's advice is to pray. Believers should pray, Paul says pray about every circumstance and we should couple requests with Thanksgiving. Even in the midst of real challenges or changes in my life. Thank God first. What happens when we pray in this way? What will these prayers produce? Peace that surpasses all understanding.

Verses 8-9

⁸ Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. ⁹ Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

Paul's list of virtues assumes that the world does contain good qualities that merit the believer's consideration. However, we would be wrong to let these guide our spiritual and

ethical decisions. We are to “think about such things”. Thinking also means discernment as an individual but also, as a community of faith.

There is good to be found in our culture. The image of God resides in everyone. Believe. However, we know that everything must be measured against the standard of the Gospel as preserved for us in the Bible. In summary, verses 4-9 remind us of the importance of unity and the challenge to be determined to find ways to cope when we have disagreements. Always favouring an even handedness approach in mediating between rival parties within the church.

Further when Christians find themselves facing heavy opposition and persecution, we are to be gentle rather than vindictive, prayerful rather than anxious. Also, we are not to be so suspicious of the prevailing culture that we stand in danger of denying that the World has anything of value. When we were an evacuation centre for the terrible flooding in Ranui, we had all sorts of people turning up to volunteer to help. In amongst them were plenty of non-Christians who wanted to help out in a time of need.

They had the time and the energy, so they turned up to help. I remember talking to a father and daughter. He was out of work and she was off school. They were unaffected by the floods so they decided they could come and help. Later in the day I saw them both cleaning our toilets. Good people, yes, but good people who need Jesus.

On the other hand, this passage is a reminder to any who are tempted to embrace the World’s standards without a mind that is informed by the Gospel. Hopefully able to discern where the World exemplifies what is good and where it has perverted the good in various ways. Thank goodness we have God’s word and the Holy Spirit to guide us.

Anxiety is a serious mental health issue in New Zealand. One in four New Zealanders will suffer from significant anxiety in their life. Many of us struggle with this. Even those who put their trust in the Lord Paul’s advice is this, believers should bring anxiety and troubling issues in their lives in a spirit of gratitude. Thanksgiving has a way of mitigating anxiety. We should channel nervous energy into prayer. Anxious hearts often pray with fear and desperation but Paul tells them to make their requests to God with thanksgivings in their hearts.

As Jesus teaches us, the father knows what each person wants before they ask.

Matthew 6: 7-8 And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. ⁸ Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. It’s a good reminder that God can intervene in our lives if we allow him to. Personally, I have found that starting with prayers of thanksgiving before I ask for anything kind of settles my heart and spirit. Then I wait on God. Then that peace that Paul talks about. The peace beyond all human understanding falls gently upon me.

Further, Paul is stating that we should cast our intellectual nets widely. To find all that is noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, and praiseworthy. Then to allow this to shape our

thinking. He then urges the church to practice what they have learned from the Christian tradition. Then they can approach the values of the unbelieving World with a critical eye, an eye that can integrate what they find with the truth found in Scripture.

That's a challenge that we face every day. God does not always offer physical solutions like solving problems with the flick of a magic wand. Sometimes prayers are answered in ways that the problem disappears. Often that is not how God operates. Later, Paul talks about his own experiences and what God has offered him is not always relief and rescue but contentment and perseverance.

In verse 9: ⁹ Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you. Practice means living out your faith always centred on Jesus and remembering Pauls words to the church at Corinth (1 Cor: 13:13) ¹³ And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

Verses 10 – 19: ¹⁰ I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. ¹¹ I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. ¹² I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. ¹³ I can do all this through him who gives me strength. ¹⁴ Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles.

¹⁵ Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; ¹⁶ for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid more than once when I was in need. ¹⁷ Not that I desire your gifts; what I desire is that more be credited to your account. ¹⁸ I have received full payment and have more than enough. I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. ¹⁹ And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.

Paul takes time in these closing verses to talk about contentment. Contentment does not mean no problems and a perfect life. Contentment is sometimes described as 'quiet satisfaction'. It is a soul anchored by peace. It doesn't mean hard times won't come. Paul knows this as he faced plenty of hard times but he also had thrilling and joy filled moments.

Summary of the book of Philippians

Chapter One: The Gospel, despite any challenging circumstances is **Unstoppable**.

Chapter Two: The story of Jesus Christ serves as our model of humility. **Humility** is needed if the church wants to be united together as they face both persecution and the need to be a credible witness to those around them.

Chapter Three: The Gospel means a complete **transformation of life**. It must be measured against worldly pressures and followed at all costs.

Chapter Four: The God of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is a **God of peace**. This peace stands in the face of anxiety and fear and will not be found wanting.