

Philippians
February 8, 2009
Phil. 4:1-7

I. Reacting to Situations

How do you react when things are not going your way? From a personal viewpoint, there are times when I am pleased with my reactions. At other times, I am less than pleased; in these situations, I often see the need to back off from those things irritating me or making me nervous to attempt to rebalance my thinking.

II. Standing Firm

Phil 4:1

4:1 Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends!

NIV

We discuss this verse in some detail last time. What does it mean?

In today's lesson (and in next week's lesson), we will discuss the how we can stand firm.

III. Agree with Each Other

Phil 4:2-3

2 I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord. 3 Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow, help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.

NIV

One of the great difficulties of standing firm is disunity within the ranks. First, we are obviously not united if we have strong disagreements. Second, such disagreements affect each party of the dispute negatively. In both cases, the ability for the church or for individuals to be united in the Lord is compromised.

In a more general sense, Paul has already asked the Philippians to agree as in 1:27 and 2:2. Apparently disagreement was a significant problem in Philippi...whether several disagreements over several issues or only over one issue where the whole church is taking sides.

Per the UBS Handbook Series, the expression [to agree with each other-- *to auto phronein*] means much more than to agree in thought or opinion; it means also to strive after a unity and harmony in life which is possible because of their common bond in the Lord.

These are the names of two women. How would you like to be called out by name in a forum that is as public as this letter? Of course, he also writes something really nice about them in the next verse. Notice that Paul does not take sides...probably a pretty good lesson for pastors anywhere or any time.

The identity of the “loyal yokefellow” (what a title!) is unknown. Some people suggest that “loyal yokefellow” is a play on someone’s name (e.g. Syzygus), but we do not really know this. The exact name Syzygus (literally “yokeperson” has not been identified in the literature of the time as a proper name. Whoever this man might have been, Paul seems convinced that he could trust on this man to help. “Contended” is also translated “labor.”

Those whose names are in the Book of Life are those who are saved.

IV. Rejoice!

Phil 4:4-5

4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! 5 Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.

NIV

We have discussed it before, but let’s do it again. What does “joy” or “rejoice” mean?

Answer: There are many kinds of joy are reported in the Bible. This makes it difficult to give a simple definition of joy. Even the wicked are said to experience joy in their triumphs over the righteous (1 Cor 13:6; Rev 11:10). Many levels of joy are also described, including gladness, contentment, and cheerfulness.

But the joy which the people of God should have is holy and pure. This joy rises above circumstances and focuses on the very character of God. The joy required of the righteous person (Ps 150; Phil 4:4) is produced by the Spirit of God (Gal 5:22).

As used in verse “gentleness” is undoubtedly a fruit of the Spirit, but the word for “gentleness” used in this verse is not found in Gal. 5:22-23. This word describes someone willing to yield his or her own rights to show consideration and gentleness to others, per the Life Application Commentary. Muller suggests that it means reasonableness, goodwill, moderation, and magnanimity. Here we see that gentleness is related to Christ and that Paul’s “timid” nature is based on it.

2 Cor 10:1

10:1 By the meekness and gentleness of Christ, I appeal to you — I, Paul, who am "timid" when face to face with you, but "bold" when away!

NIV

Both joy and gentleness manifest in the Christian through the power of God. The Christian must realize that the Lord is near, that the end is near. By focusing on eternity and God’s infinite power and infinite love for us, we can live our lives without giving into anxieties caused by the problems of the world.

Note: “The Lord is near probably has a double meaning in this text. First, Paul has just discussed the Book of Life an indication of eternity and therefore thinking of the Second Coming of Jesus comes to mind. The clause could also mean that the Lord is not far from us. This is the way that Paul used “far” and “near” earlier.

V. Do Not Be Anxious!

Phil 4:6-7

6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, 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.

NIV

Note Phil. 1:6, 2:3, and 2:14. This is another command that we will likely have difficulty fulfilling since we are still under construction by God.

Of course, worrying is bad because it is a subtle distrust of God...or said differently, if we truly trust fully in the Lord, then we do not have a need for worrying.

Was Paul ever anxious? Did he ever worry?

Does this verse mean that God is the great Santa Claus in the sky of whom we can ask anything? Indeed, this verse with 4:7 indicates that it is more a matter of discussion to find out how to have the peace of God in a particular situation. As such, the answer can certainly be no...we should always make sure in our minds that we trust God enough to accept a negative answer if that is the best choice per God.

Matt 6:34

4 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

NIV

The peace of God is available to us since he guards our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. In 4:4-7, we see that we are to follow the Spirit with joy and gentleness, knowing that the Lord is near without being anxious about this life. This comes from the Lord, but we have our part to play in it as well. As we practice these behaviors being faithful to the Lord, then he will do even more by guarding our hearts and minds in Jesus. Joy, gentleness, lack of anxiety, and peace are all the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Given Matt. 6:7-8, is there really any value in prayer?

What do you contemplate when you think of the “peace of God”?

VI. Questions

If you consulted a psychologist today, what might you think that he would recommend to you to reduce anxiety? What would the Bible suggest? Are these the same or different? Why do you think that they are the same or different?

How are “joy” and “anxiety” related? What would it take for you to stop worrying?

Generally speaking, when we are anxious, where is our focus? When we have joy, where is our focus?

VII. Next Week

What does it take to think worthy thoughts? Actually this week!