

Peace in Biblical Perspective: The Peace of God and the God of Peace

Philippians 4:1-13

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Here Paul is wrapping up his letter to the Philippians and he has a close intimate relationship with the church at Philippi. He has told them to be like Christ and to consider all things as rubbish compared to knowing Christ. He has challenged them in terms of their perspective and their citizenship being in heaven and their walk with the Lord. Then he wraps up by saying in Philippians 4:1–13 says

[1] Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved. [2] I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. [3] Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life. [4] Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. [5] Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; [6] do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. [7] And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. [8] Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. [9] What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you. [10] I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. [11] Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. [12] I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. [13] I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

This is an interesting passage of Scripture and in this study we'll try to break it down to understand better what God is trying to say to us. There are three definitive things that Paul says to them in terms of what he wants them to do. He

begins his communication with them by telling them to one, stand firm in the Lord. Two, they are to agree in the Lord and three, they are to rejoice in the Lord.

Paul begins by telling them to stand firm in the Lord. I don't have to tell you that the world is a tough place. There is evil all around us. We are not unopposed. We are opposed because we have an adversary. The world is a difficult and challenging place. The world throws all kinds of things at us and is very strategic in how it seeks to deceive us and to lead us astray in terms of what Satan would want us to believe or not to believe about God. The world is not 'almost' Christian. I don't ever get the sense when reading the newspaper or watching the news that we're almost a Christian city, Christian state or Christian nation. It is a remnant. There is but a remnant of faithful believers that God Himself has set apart that He has opened their eyes and ears to the Gospel and their understanding in the Scripture. They are to be shining like light in this incredibly dark world.

So Paul says to them and us in the midst of this tumultuous world to stand firm. If we're not careful then our immediate default response when we're told to stand firm is 'I got that.' I'll stand firm with my own strength, my own power and I'll be faithful and strong. We try to stand firm only to get hit and tossed by the different waves of trials and tribulations that would come upon us in this world and we just get battered to no end. He is not saying to show yourself to be worthy of your God by standing firm but he says to stand firm thus, in your God. He is saying to anchor yourself to the Lord. To stand firm is to connect yourself to something that will not move.

What is that thing that will not move? God will never move. He'll never change. What has God given to us that we might be able to stand firm? He has given us His Word. His Word is that stake in the ground, that immovable object. He has given us His Spirit so we can understand the Word of God. When we take our eyes and thoughts off the Word of God all of a sudden we can't stand firm. The Lord gave me a life lesson here in order for me to understand and apply this. This won't surprise anyone who knows me well and that is I probably took one too many hits to the head whether it was done by my brother who threw almost anything and everything that was movable or playing football. For some reason I always led with my head and I guess I was never smart enough to figure out that I was going to get hurt doing that.

On several occasions there were times I didn't remember exactly what happened during certain football games I played in. On one occasion when I was at Samford, the day after the game I watched a film of me playing and didn't remember me doing anything the second half. That is a scary thought and it almost made me sick at my stomach to sit and watch myself do stuff that I couldn't remember doing. The worst part was I think it was the best second half of football I've ever played in my life. If I had told my coach that he probably would have taken a 2 by 4 to my head before every game.

I don't know all the technical terms but somewhere along the way there was something done inside of my head where I can't ever pass those concussion tests that they give these days. One of the tests they do is they tell a person to stand up with their ankles touching, hands at their side and then close their eyes. When I do that this whole room would begin to sway. Apparently when I do that it has been explained to me that my head is looking for a point of reference. God has taught me in order to stop that all I have to do is this. I can stand up here because my brain goes through my pinky that is touching the pulpit or when I stand up here on Sunday mornings to give announcements as long as my leg is touching the chair then my brain has a reference point. As long as my brain has a reference point and I just open one eye a little bit then I'm fine. That fixes everything for me.

God uses that in my life to say that if I'm not anchored to the Word of God or have at least a pinky that is leaning on the Word of God then when the winds of doctrine from this world are going to come I can literally feel myself swaying. All of a sudden what was up, seems down and what was left, seems right and I get completely confused. I realize that I'm not standing firm in the Lord. I'm trying to stand firm but I'm just not standing firm in the Lord, in His Word and in His Spirit. He gives us some instructions that help us understand how to stand firm and when He does He gives us a list of things that we're to think about.

I'm going to suggest that typically this is the way this passage is read by Christians. Christians would read Philippians 4:8 this way; [8] *Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things*, as if those weren't special needed words. These are instructions. I tried to slow down when I read this earlier.

When you read 'whatever is true,' think on that. What is true? The Word of God is true. What else is true? Not much else is true. Think about those things. What is honorable? What is it that is truly honorable in this world? What is it that deserves honor? Jesus Christ is honorable. Think on these things. What is just? There is not much justice in our world. We have what I believe to be one of the best governmental systems on paper but we don't have a just system. There is injustice all the way through our system. It seems to be a commercial of injustice. So what is just? Two Christian business men having a conversation over a business deal is just and sometimes not. God's will is just. You see in scripture that even when difficult things happen to people in the Bible they say "God is just." Joseph and the Israelites are an example of declaring God is just in difficult times. Paul tells us to think on these things. What is pure and holy? God is pure. God is holy. His Spirit is holy.

Paul is not just simply throwing this list out there just to tell us to think about good things or think happy thoughts or Biblical thoughts. He is saying that what you should do in order to be anchored and stand firm in the Lord is to consume your thoughts with the things of God, the things of His Word so that you can answer those questions like what is lovely. For the Gospel is lovely and beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news. What is it that is commendable? God commends us in obedience to the Word. God Himself is excellent and Jesus Christ is worthy of praise. Spend time thinking of these things and not just as passing thoughts. That will help you to stand firm thus in the Lord.

In order to stand firm, as Paul directs us to do, how much time are we investing on thinking of these things? There is a unique strategy that is here. One, if you'll be intentional about pouring into your mind this list that Paul has put before us, I know you won't have time to think about other things. So there is a very practical strategy as well as a spiritual strategy here. If you spend your time thinking on these things you won't have time to think of these other things and you'll quickly identify the facade of the world. As you spend time thinking on these things, when the world throws something at you you'll quickly know not to buy into that and eventually you'll begin to lose your appetite for the things of the world. I would love to lose my appetite for the things of the world. I am convicted that I have any appetite for the things of the world. Paul says to think on these things thus stand firm in the Lord.

Secondly, Paul tells them to agree in the Lord and then he does something pretty unique. Paul takes on an argument with two women. I wouldn't go there. I have concluded that unless two women named *Euodia and Syntyche* then I'm not applying this passage. Paul doesn't tell you what the disagreement is because it doesn't matter and that's the point. They are having a significant disagreement but the topic of it doesn't matter for the problem is that they are not agreeing in the Lord. He couches this, a couple of different ways. These are beloved people, fellow believers and their names are written in the book of life. Paul wants others to step in help them because they are having a disagreement and they need to agree in the Lord. He wants others to help them come to a compromise and help them understand the reality of the situation.

What they to agree in the Lord? They are to agree that for the sake of the name of Jesus Christ and for the sake of the Gospel this argument needs to end. There is no way we're going to put this argument before the Lord. That is much better expressed to other people than to yourself. In other words, if you're having this problem, then swing by because it's easy for me to tell you this. If I'm having this problem then I begin to rationalize by saying 'this is important and big.' Then I need to say does this rise to the level of the Gospel of Jesus Christ? No it doesnot. Therefore our agreement is in the Lord. This could be solved and the two women could never agree on the technicalities of their disagreement. They never see it the same way but they do agree in Jesus Christ and that alone is

enough to trump whatever disagreement they are having. So he calls them to agree in the Lord and to be reconciled in the Lord.

Paul is telling them to stand firm in the Lord. In a dying world they are going to watch you stand firm and it will catch their eye. They are going to want to know and understand how you can do that. Two, he says to agree in the Lord and that will be an attractive testimony of the church as well. These who agree in the Lord and you know they were at odds with each other will experience reconciliation because of Jesus Christ and then the watching world will want to know about Jesus Christ. Then he says this third statement, rejoice in the Lord. Sometimes if I'm not careful I can read a verse like this that says rejoice in the Lord and again I say rejoice and think 'yeah let's be happy in God.' That's a pleasant thing to say. That's what we do when we gather for church in the Lord. We smile and greet one another and that's to rejoice in the Lord. No, when Paul uses that word rejoice he is going way beyond the statement of be happy in God. Paul is using this to show us how to be truly content in the Lord and not just be happy. He wants us to have true joy and content with God. Not contentment meaning that it's less than great but I'll take it for that's our use of the word. Content means to be fully satisfied. Be fully satisfied with the Lord like when you have a full meal. When you have eaten a huge meal and you're full, you couldn't possibly eat something else. So that now when you look at something you'd normally eat or like you have no appetite for it anymore. You are full as you could possibly be with no more appetite for anything else. That is this contentment, this joy, this rejoicing that Paul is talking about here. We are to be fully content and satisfied in God Himself.

If the church of Jesus Christ rejoiced in the Lord always, evangelism would be a lot easier. Think about it. The world doesn't rejoice. The world complains. I dare you to find a show on TV that has joy. It's a critique. All it is, is people playing expert on whatever it is and telling you what you're supposed to think. The world has no real joy. When the world gets some little piece of joy, how does our country celebrate? I have tried to understand this and ask the Lord to try and give me insight on this but here is something I just don't understand and it's a statement about the heart and mind of people in our country. Some of the most celebratory things we have in our country unfortunately are sporting events. Think back at when some city in our country wins something big. They tear up the city. Why is that? I don't understand that. "We won so let's go downtown and turn over the police cars!" Shouldn't the losers do that? So that is celebrating in our country?

Our world, our country, our culture have no concept of rejoicing. If the world were to see a church rejoicing, talk about catching their attention! They would be saying things like "Wow!" Our evangelistic testimonies would probably start out like 'I really hadn't planned to share the Gospel but they came over and said 'we need to know what's up with you people. What's so different about you? Why is there so much joy in your life for the world's tough.' I see that bad things happen

to you like they do me but you have joy in your life and I'm depressed, how is that possible? If the Christian church were truly rejoicing in the Lord always then evangelism would be so much easier for we'd simply be responding to those people that want to know what's different about us.

As Paul begins to tell them about rejoicing in the Lord always he then gives them a command that is a surprising transition but it is also an overwhelming statement. He says do not be anxious about anything. When I read that I thought there must be a Greek word for anything that means something less than anything. It can't mean than, right? There has to be some allowance for anxiousness because honestly I'm anxious before I know it. I never plan to be anxious. I don't have to because it will come. All of sudden the anxiousness comes over you and so how can Paul say not to be anxious about anything.

There is a connection here between rejoice in the Lord always and do not be anxious about anything because rejoicing and contentment in the Lord is to be trusting in the Lord and when we trust in the Lord we trust Him in these things that give us anxiety. What is it that gives us anxiety? It is those things that we want to control desperately but we can't instead of trusting God in how He is going to work through these things in a particular way.

Then Paul gives us the secret to not being anxious. Philippians 4:6 says *[6] do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.* The secret to not being anxious is prayer. It doesn't mean that if you pray He'll end your anxiety or that if you pray He'll give you the answer and once you have the answer you won't be anxious anymore. You have already lived long enough to know that is not true. It's that prayer is the answer to not being anxious.

Here is a scenario. My wife and I have two sons and two daughters. So we divide a lot and conquer every once in a while. We have had to learn who does what. Early on one of my two daughters had this deep, emotional relational issue that she needed to talk about. I'm not sure why but at this time it was my turn. So I went in to talk with her about this and it didn't help at all. Everything that I said did no good. So I said to my wife "You're going to have to talk to her." My wife said "Why don't we bring her into the bedroom and the two of us talk to her." So that's what we did. I noticed my wife's posture was different with this particular child and the child began to bear her heart. I'm thinking 'ok honey tell her what to do for its an easy solution.' My wife listened and listened, hugged her, and prayed with her and then she jumped up and said "Mom you're the best!" and left the room.

It drove me batty because she left with no solution. My advice was a lot better than my wife's for my wife didn't give any advice. I'm thinking that can't possibly be right. What my daughter needed was the presence of my wife. She actually needed the presence of her father but he wasn't smart enough to figure that out.

She needed the presence of a person in her life that loved her, gave her stability and was able to communicate in more than solutions that her situation was okay and here's a little perspective about this thing. Sometimes my wife will say "Honey you're the best husband in the world and I always feel better when I talk to you," she'll hug me and then she'll walk out of the room. I think 'I didn't say anything.' You would think that eventually I would learn that it's the presence that means the most.

I understand the illustrations break down but Paul is saying that it's not about the solution. It's the actual conversation with God and getting face to face with Him. He says to pray and talk to God about everything. Experience God in everything and when you do that the presence of God will guard your heart and mind in Christ Jesus. The presence of God is what actually will bring you peace.

We tend to think that the peace of God is this thing, it's this emotion and if you come to Him and ask for it then He'll give it to you and send you on your way. That is the wrong understanding of Philippians 4:7. The peace of God is the presence of God. So when He says to come to Him and talk about it, then that is the peace with God. Jesus is our peace, not brings us peace. So He says rejoice in Me always, don't be anxious, instead talk to Me and meet with Me. Bear your heart before the Lord for you know He won't leave you, He loves you and He's in control of all things.

So now when I get anxious or not rejoicing in the Lord or not content in the Lord, now all I have to do is pray and talk to God and I'll feel better. I'd love to say 'yes' to that but Paul tells us in this passage that he has learned to be content with God. That tells you several things. One, Paul didn't used to be content. So Paul has had to learn to be content with God. You can conclude that he has both succeeded and failed numerous times along the way. That is the process of learning. You can conclude that he has a teacher where someone is teaching him how to be content. We know Paul has a teacher that has taught him to be content and he acknowledges who his teacher is in an indirect way. He says he understands what it means to be brought low. Who does Paul think brought him low? It was not the guards, the enemy, or the opposition to the church. God did. God brought him low in order to teach him to be content. God gave him abundance in order to teach him and to be thankful in terms of what He gave him.

My favorite example of God teaching us to be content which is what I think He is doing right now to teach us contentment as we speak. He wants us to be content, fully satisfied and to have an appetite for nothing but Him with no appetite whatsoever for this world. As the Israelites were in slavery and released from slavery in a very unique fashion, literally the gold and silver were thrown at them. They leave Egypt and are about to be taken over by the Egyptian army at the Red Sea and God parts the sea which allows them to go across and kills the Egyptian army in the Red Sea. They get to the other side and they were anxious

and discontent. So they took the very blessings that God gave to them and built an idol. Then they said that the gold calf they built was what got them out of slavery. Any logical person would say they don't have a calf like that but idols are not logical. They were searching for something to fill up the rest of the cup. So they built up an idol to try and fill up the rest of their cup so that they could be content but they wanted contentment apart from the Lord.

So what did God do to them? How did God respond to them in their life? He did a lot of things but I'll point out two primary things. One is that He gave them simple rules and laws. We are going to have to approach this in a way that you can understand and apply. Secondly, He did what I think is an amazingly strategic thing. They were in the wilderness where nothing could grow and everything tends to die so God fed them for the day. I'll teach you to trust Me for enough food for a day and then tomorrow I'll feed you for the day. Then the next day I'll feed you enough for that day. I'm going to do that for four years. The only day you'll do a little more gathering is to prepare for the Sabbath for that will be a double day. So in God's ingenious plan to teach them to be fully content with Him, He forced them by what they needed to only get enough for the day. He is doing the same thing in your life.

He is doing it in a different way but He is trying to teach us to be content with Him and to rejoice in the Lord always in all things. We must be taught by God to do that. So part of what frustrates us in the trials and tribulations of life are by the hand of God so that He can teach us to trust and depend upon Him. He shows us that when we're at the end of our rope, we're really not. He has us by His hand. Then He'll bless us and give us more than we deserve so that we can learn to trust and depend upon Him but that's a trap in and of itself as well.

Paul in his instructions to Timothy who he is trying to teach to be content says in I Timothy 6:6–10,

[6] But godliness with contentment is great gain, [7] for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. [8] But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. [9] But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. [10] For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.

In Hebrews 13:5 he says, [5] *Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."* The secret to contentment is the presence of God.

As we sing that song, *Behold Our God*, I have a hard time thinking about anything else. The chorus says; *Behold our God seated on His throne, Come, let*

us adore Him, Behold our King—nothing can compare, Come, let us adore Him. In that moment it is like none of you are here but the problem is the song ends and now all the rest of the world comes crashing back in. I think what Paul is saying is that I need to live in a posture where I'm embracing the presence of God in my life, rejoicing, adoring and putting yourself before God who is seated on the throne. When I am in that posture then the things of this earth do grow strangely dim.

I'll close with this. Paul makes a statement that we all know. We may have used it in a bit of a stretch of context. He says I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. Most of our default to that is that I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me so I can get my wish list of things I want to do. In the context of this passage I think one of the things I think we're supposed to apply that to, is that I can be content with God when I do all things through Christ who strengthens me. I can be fully satisfied with God and have no appetite whatsoever with the things of this world. I can do that through Christ who strengthens me. I can rejoice in the Lord always. I can be anxious about nothing. I can be compelled to a life of continuous dependent prayer. I can do that through Christ who strengthens me. I can agree in the Lord and be reconciled with brothers and sisters in Christ through Christ who strengthens me. I can stand firm, not on my own ability but in Christ who strengthens me.

Here is one thing I'd like you to ponder is if you struggle to be content with God, fully satisfied with the Lord, then I would suggest that you ask God what idol you have built in your life. God, what idol is in my life? Is it what people think of me or success or what? God, help me to destroy that idol so that I would no longer feed on that beast and by the power of Your Spirit who is fully content in you, I too would be fully content and satisfied, rejoicing in You always. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Most gracious heavenly Father, Lord, how we thank You for Your Word. Lord, thank You for Your Spirit who guides us and directs us into Your Word. Lord, You know our hearts and we need to know our hearts so Lord would You reveal to us where we are refusing to stand firm in You. Maybe we are trying to stand firm in our own strength or maybe it is that we are trying to not stand and we are shrinking back. May that not be true of us but Lord, help us to stand true in Your Word by Your Spirit to agree in You and Lord, help us to rejoice in You always, to be fully and completely content in Your presence in our life, in who You are, in our relationship with You so that we might trust You with all of the confusing and different circumstances that we find ourselves in. May the rock and the anchor in the midst of all that be Your presence for Lord, Your peace is who You are so Lord with Your presence with us, grant to us Your peace that we might have confidence to be fully satisfied with You and having no appetite for this world for we pray that in Jesus' Name, Amen.

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