

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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Philippians - The Christian Life: Victorious Christian Living - Philippians 4:1-23

Growth in nature depends on hidden resources. The great trees send their roots deep into the earth to draw up the necessary water and minerals by which they thrive. So a Christian's secret communion with God leads to **Victorious Christian Living** which is the subject covered by Philippians 4:1-23.

- In Philippians 4:1 the Apostle Paul tells us to **stand fast**.
- In Philippians 4:2-3, he begs us **to be of one mind**.
- In Philippians 4:4-9, he encourages **right attitudes**.
- In Philippians 4:10-20, he examines an example **of Christian giving and receiving**; and finally,
- In Philippians 4:21-23, he closes with **greetings**.

Stand Fast (Philippians 4:1)

On the basis of the coming of the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, and His work in changing our bodies to be like His own glorious body, the Apostle now encourages the Philippian Christians to **stand fast in the Lord**. This relates back to Paul's conduct in the faith in Philippians 3:7-10 where he counts honour or privilege in this life to be but refuse in order to gain the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord and so win Christ. Our very beings should be so moved by affection for Christ that nothing should come into our lives which would move us to displace Him from that first place in our lives.

Philippians 4:1 also shows the tender affection which Paul had for these believers. Firstly, he calls them his brethren. But not only his brethren, rather his brethren beloved. Secondly, he adds the thought that he longs for them, that is, he longs to be with them again, Thirdly he speaks of them as his joy and crown - meaning that they were a cause of both rejoicing and honour to him in the faith, and will continue to be his crown until the judgement seat of Christ (See 2 Corinthians 5:10) when he receives his full reward. Lastly, he closes the verse with the expression "my dearly beloved."

The Apostle really loved the Lord's people. This is, without doubt, the source of his effectiveness in the work of the Lord.

Be of one mind (Philippians 4:2-3)

In Philippians 4:2-3, we find the Apostle speaking directly to a couple of sisters in Christ. He tells them to **be of one mind**. It is clear that Euodias, meaning "prosperous journey", and Syntyche, meaning "an accident", were sisters in the assembly at Philippi who were at odds with one another. The Scripture remains silent as to the cause of their disagreement, but it was having an adverse affect on the church. The Apostle pleads with them both using the word "beseech". He uses it once before each name so that no favouritism is apparent. He urges them to be of the same mind **in the Lord**. Although, we may not agree with each other in many aspects of daily life, it should be the norm to be agreed if we are found under the Lordship of Christ. It is His mind that unites us. There is no place for personal differences or petty quarrels in the church if the Lord is to be glorified and His work progressed.

It is difficult to discern to whom Philippians 4:3 is addressed. There are two main thoughts. The first is that the Greek word for "yoke-fellow" is "synzygus" which may be used as a proper noun and, hence, be the name of the person addressed. The second is that it refers to Epaphroditus, who was to return to Philippi bearing this letter (Philippians 2:28-29). Whichever the case, he is exhorted to help these two women who had once been devoted labourers in the Gospel with the Apostle himself, Clement and others. We may take this as sound advice. An independent third party with mature, spiritual judgement can often help to settle a problem between individuals by showing them the scriptural solution to their problem.

The clause, "they laboured with me in the gospel" (Philippians 4:2), shows their devotion to supporting the Lord's work. Their labour might have included showing hospitality to the servants of Christ; visiting homes; and, teaching younger women and children. It doesn't mean that they preached. That the women of Scripture did not assume a

ministry of **public** teaching or preaching is shown by 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 and 1 Timothy 2:9-15, although they might well tell out the Gospel in private conversation.

Clement, meaning "merciful", is also mentioned in Philippians 4:3. He was a fellow-worker with Paul along with others whose names were "in the book of life". This last phrase seems to refer to the book of all living from which the names of unbelievers are blotted out (see Revelation 3:5 and Revelation 20:15). This leaves only the names of the faithful. What a delightful way of showing the eternal blessing and assurance that goes along with faith in Christ and service for Him!

Right Attitudes (Philippians 4:4-9)

"**Watch your attitudes**" is Paul's cry in Philippians 4:4-9. This time, the Apostle is addressing the whole church at Philippi. He begins with the command, "Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice!" (Philippians 4:4) We are not only to believe and to trust in Him; but we are to rejoice in Him also. This leads us to consideration of things that would hinder our rejoicing in the Lord.

Firstly, there is the harsh unyielding spirit that always insists on its own rights. Being a source of self-occupation and discontent, it may hinder our rejoicing. Therefore, Paul says, "Let your moderation be known unto all men" (Philippians 4:5) So these Christians were to be marked by forbearance and gentleness instead. In this way, they would be witnesses to all men. The fact that "the Lord is at hand" probably means that the Lord's coming is near.

Secondly, there were the various trials of life which so easily filled them with anxiety. The word "**careful**" in Philippians 4:6 could be translated "anxious". Hence, Paul recommended that they should not worry, but pray! This is balanced prayer. It is crying to God with an earnest asking; but with accompanying thanksgiving for previous benefits. In Hebrews 5:7 we read of the way in which Christ prayed: "Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared."

Everything should be taken to the Lord in prayer. "Everything" means there is not one single thing too great or too small for His loving care. So the sin of worry should not mark the Christian. Our attitude should be that of the hymn writer JM Scriven who wrote:

*What a Friend we have in Jesus
All our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry
Everything to God in prayer!
Oh, what peace we often forfeit!
Oh, what needless pain we bear!
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer.*

Daniel, in Daniel 6:1-10 shows us how to pray when hindrances are placed between us and our God. Although forbidden to pray, he "**kneeled upon his knees three times a day and prayed, and gave thanks before his God...**" (Daniel 6:10). His prayer was heard. No matter how difficult the trials of life may be, it should always be possible for the believer to rejoice in the Lord knowing that "all things work together for good to them that love God" (Romans 8:28). With this knowledge, and the assurance that God is always acting for us, then our hearts and minds are guarded by the peace of God. It has been well said that happiness depends on circumstances; but our deep-seated joy is permanently fixed in the promises of God which cannot be broken. This peace passes all understanding. People of the world cannot understand it at all. But Christians who know it are strengthened by its power.

In Philippians 4:8, the Apostle advises us about our **thought life**. The Bible insists that Christians can control what they think. Proverbs 23:7 tells us that a man is what he thinks. It is useless to be defeatist, saying that we simply cannot help having awful thoughts. We can discipline our thought life by thinking positively. Owing to the affections that Christians have for Christ, then they cannot have evil thoughts and thoughts about the Lord Jesus at the same time. So the discipline of a pure mind is to focus our thoughts on the Person and Work of Christ. Unfortunately, today's church is distressed because Christians take their eyes off Christ (see Matthew 14:22-23) and consider only the characteristics and weaknesses of their fellows. You do not have to look very closely at Philippians 4:8 to find the Lord Jesus Christ. Everything that is true, honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report, virtuous, and praiseworthy is seen in Him.

Let us look at these virtues one by one.

- "True" means **genuine** or **real**.
- "Honest" means **honourable**.

- “Just” means **righteous**, both toward God and man.
- “Pure” means **not tainted** in any way.
- “Lovely” has the idea of that which is **admirable** or **pleasing**.
- “Of good report” has also been translated **well reputed**.
- “Virtue” speaks of **moral excellence**, and “praise” means **worthy of commendation**.

If the supreme expression of these things is found in Christ, there was also an exhibition of them in the life of the Apostle Paul himself. There is no false modesty here. Paul is able to set himself forward as a pattern saint. He urges the believers to practise the things which they learned from him and which they saw in his life (Philippians 4:9). In another place, he exhorts others to follow him as he himself follows Christ. That's the key!

Right living is the result of right thinking. If a person's thought-life is pure, then his life will be pure. The God of peace will be with him. In Philippians 4:7, the **peace** of God is the possession of those who are prayerful; in Philippians 4:9 the **God** of peace is the Companion of those who are holy. God will make Himself very near and dear in the lives of those who are faithful. On the other hand, if a person's mind is a tree of corruption, then you can be sure that the fruit will be unpalatable also. Think an evil thought long enough and you will quickly find yourself acting on it.

Christian Giving and Receiving (Philippians 4:10-20)

In Philippians 4:10-20 the Apostle is saying a big “**Thank you**” to the Christians at Philippi. How meaningful these verses have been for Christians who have found themselves in adverse circumstances financially.

Paul rejoices in the Lord greatly that the church at Philippi had become concerned about his needs and sent him a gift (Philippians 4:10). This care is said to flourish again which has the idea of a tree budding and blossoming. That's why, in Philippians 4:17, the gift is accounted as fruit for God which will receive its reward in a coming day. No doubt this was of the Lord's prompting for it came at a time when the imprisoned Paul really needed their love. Yet, he had been in their thoughts for some time because there had been a delay in sending the gift. He genuinely appreciated that they hadn't lacked the care; but only the chance to show it (Philippians 4:10). The opportunity came with the journey of Epaphroditus (Philippians 2:25).

Philippians 4:11-12 show that the Apostle had learned, through experience, to be content with his lot whatever the circumstances. Godliness with contentment is great gain! (1 Timothy 6:6) In this way, the desire for riches is blotted out. Paul knew that wherever he was, or in whatever circumstances he found himself, he was there by divine appointment.

Then the Apostle adds the words which have been a puzzle to many. “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Philippians 4:13) Through Christ, Paul was strengthened to do all those things which were in the will of God for him even in the most adverse of circumstances. He knew the meaning of the Lord's words in 2 Corinthians 12:9: “My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.” Paul's response was: “Most gladly therefore will I glory in my infirmities, that **the power of Christ** may rest upon me. Therefore, I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong” (Philippians 4:9-10)

In Philippians 4:14, Paul states his appreciation of their action in providing for him. He counted it as fellowship with his sufferings. He further notes that this seemed to be a special objective of the Philippians because they had been the only church to have helped him in a similar way on previous occasions - for example, when he left Macedonia and while he was in Thessalonica (Philippians 4:15-16). When we remember that Paul was in Thessalonica only two or three weeks (Acts 17:1-4), it makes their care for him there all the more remarkable. Overall, this teaches us that what is given to the Lord's servants is given to the Lord. He is interested in every penny. He records all that is done as unto Him.

All that we have is God's! When we give to the service of the Lord, we are only giving Him what is His own (see 1 Chronicles 29:14). It is a form of consecration a filling of the hands in giving back to God. In this age of grace, it should be the Christians desire to live economically and sacrificially in order to give an ever-increasing portion of his income to the work of the Lord that men might not perish for want of hearing the gospel of Christ.

When Paul says “I have all, and abound” in Philippians 4:18, he means that more than his needs have been met. It seems strange in this day of 20th century commercialism to hear a servant of the Lord who is not begging for money, but rather admits to having sufficient. Today, some so-called Christian campaigns beg for money to meet their expenses. This is an abomination in the sight of God and a reproach to the Name of Christ. The missionary, Hudson Taylor, once said that God's work, carried on in God's way, for God's glory, will never lack God's resources.

The gift which Epaphroditus brought from the Philippians to Paul is described as an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God. The only other time these words are used, they refer to Christ Himself (Ephesians 5:2). There the objective is for Christians to walk in love, just as Christ did. The Philippians were expressing this love in their gift. They gave sacrificially. 2 Corinthians 8:2 tells us that they themselves were impoverished. How instructive for us! We are often unsympathetic and stingy because our own experiences of suffering and need is so shallow. Hence, Paul dignifies the sacrificial giving of the Philippians by describing what it meant to God. It ascended as a fragrant sacrifice to Him. It was both acceptable and well-pleasing (Philippians 4:18).

Now Paul adds what is perhaps the best-known and best-loved verse in this entire chapter - Philippians 4:19. It is important to note the context of this verse. It is addressed to these Philippian Christians who had just given so much of their material resources to the Lord that their own livelihood was jeopardised. Paul tells them that the Lord would supply their every need. While it is true in a general sense that God does supply the needs of His people, this is a special promise that those who are faithful stewards of that which God has given them will lack for nothing. Furthermore, God supplies the needs of His people **according** to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus - not **out** of His riches. If a millionaire gave five pence to a cause, he would be giving out of his riches. But if he gave a hundred thousand pounds to the cause, he would be giving according to his riches.

DL Moody entitled Philippians 4: 19, "**A Blank Cheque**". The Firm - "My God". Paul knew that there was none greater than his God. The Promise - "shall supply". Paul had full confidence in Him. The Amount - "all you need". Paul had proved this in his own life. The Capital - "His riches". Paul knew that God's riches were unsurpassed. The Address - "in glory". This shows that God had full control over these resources and they could not be corrupted in any way. Lastly, the Signature - "Christ Jesus". Paul acknowledges that it is only by the authority of Christ that these resources are distributed.

The Apostle then breaks out in a doxology of praise (Philippians 4:20). Both these Philippians and we ourselves may never be rich in material goods while on earth, yet we can be conscious of being enriched in the things of glory. If so, then our tongues must, like Paul's, attribute glory to our God and Father forever and ever. The third verse of the hymn, entitled "*To God be the Glory*", states:

*"Great things He hath taught us, great things He hath done,
And great our rejoicing through Jesus His Son;
But purer and higher and greater will be
Our wonder, our transport, when Jesus we see."*

(Fanny Crosby 1820-1915)

Closing greetings (Philippians 4:21-23)

In Philippians 4:21-23, we find Paul's **closing greetings**. Thinking of the believers as they would be gathered together and listening to the public reading of the letter which he was writing to them, Paul and those with him, greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The word "saint" means one who is holy or set apart to God. It refers to each true believer in Christ, the Son of the living God. It even included Euodias and Syntyche!

Philippians 4:22 is particularly noteworthy. By it we are informed that there were saints in Caesar's household. The first chapter showed us that Paul's testimony was known in the palace (Philippians 1:13); but Philippians 4:22 shows that the power of the Gospel is able to change the lives of those in the palace of the most cruel of emperors - Nero. We cannot know with certainty who these Christians were, but we can see that the Gospel knows no boundaries.

Finally, Paul closes with his characteristic greeting. "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen." It is a fitting end to such a warm letter. Thankfully we, too, know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, though He was rich, yet for our sakes was made poor, that we through His poverty might be rich (2 Corinthians 8:9). The unmerited favour which caused Him to suffer so much for us at the cross, is the same grace by which He sustains us today. As the hymn writer puts it:

*"Grace is a mine of wealth
Laid open to the poor;
Grace is the sovereign spring of health;
'Tis life for evermore."*

Thomas Kelly (1769-1854)

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