

Week 9: Joy

Chapter 4:1-9

So far... we've seen Paul's affection for the Philippian church, and his desire for them to grow in Gospel-centred love. Paul urges the church to humble Gospel-centred unity, boldly glorifying Jesus whether by life or by death. He calls them to shine like stars in the darkness of the world, following the example of Jesus, and other Gospel-hearted men. He then exposes for them the emptiness of religion compared to the surpassing worth of knowing Christ, and calls them to press on that they might come to know Him more.

The Reality of Unity

"I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord." (4:2)

At first glance this verse could be written off as just a couple of strange names of two ladies who we'll never know much about, and so hasn't got much to offer us. However I love the fact that this verse puts real flesh on the skeleton of exhortations earlier in the book. In chapter 2 Paul has urged this church towards humble Gospel-centred unity - to agree with one another, serve one another, and treat each other as better than themselves. All this for the purpose that the Gospel would go forward further and faster through the witness of this church.

Here in front of us is Paul's treatment of a situation that relates directly to all these encouragements. Euodia and Syntyche were two ladies who must have responded to the call of the Gospel through the Apostle Paul as he taught in Philippi. However, rather than becoming passive pew-fillers, they didn't only believe the Gospel but began to give themselves for the extension of the kingdom they had been brought into. They were exactly the kind of disciples that Paul wanted to grow in all of the churches - and their story wasn't necessarily replicated across the board in the churches Paul planted.

However, it appears that something has now got in the way of this Gospel-spreading partnership, and Paul is keen to specifically address the issue. The two ladies who had worked together so well were now arguing about something. Paul doesn't address the issue itself, which seems to suggest it wasn't a central Gospel issue, but then very often the things we argue about aren't.

Whether it's the style of worship, the method of evangelism, or the colour of the carpet - however important this issue may be, it's not important enough to get in the way of the Gospel going forward. In the light of this, Paul urges his sisters in Christ to agree with one another, and in doing so to love, serve and prefer each other for exactly the purpose that he has written about earlier. How tragic it is when the witness of the Gospel is slowed down or even stopped because we as God's people can't work out our differences in love so that we can stand side-by-side for the faith of the Gospel.

For Discussion:

How can unnecessary arguments get in the way of the Gospel, and how can we deal with this?

Other Verses for study:

• 1 Corinthians 1:10-31 • Colossians 3:13-14

Joy and Peace

“Rejoice in the Lord always... the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (4:4, 7)

As Paul draws near to the end of his letter to the Philippians, the different subjects begin to come thick and fast. Having addressed the specific issue relating to unity in the church, he now speaks about two massive areas in the Christian life - joy and peace. His exhortations aren't long and filled with theology, but they are no less important for this - especially when it comes to the area of joy.

In fact, Paul's exhortation to the church to rejoice couldn't be any more direct and to the point. There is no word of explanation, foundation, technique, or anything else really relating to joy - he just simply tells them to rejoice.

First off, let's recognise that this is a command - let's not make the familiar mistake of thinking that we can't control our joy because we can't control our feelings. True joy must be more than that - it's a choice that we make to find joy in any circumstance we find ourselves in, and we can do that because of that fact that our joy is 'in the Lord'. The implication is obvious - when our focus and source is simply the

Pure Focus

“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, 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.” (4:8)

Following on from his exhortations on joy and peace, Paul again hits a massively important subject for us in just a couple of lines. He's dealing here with the focus of our minds- where our thought life might take us, and what is most healthy for us in this area. You see elsewhere the Bible is pretty clear that one of the primary battlefields in our Christian lives is the battlefield of our minds. We don't often realise how powerful the things that we believe to be true can be - not what we might say we believe to be true, but what we actually are convinced of deep down inside us.

You see whether we like it or not it's fairly impossible not to live according to what we believe to be true, so if you believe a lie to be the truth you will automatically live according to that lie. For example if you were to believe the lie that God is distant from you, not wanting you to come close to Him then you will find it almost impossible to pray, no matter how much you may read and say you believe the passages

world around us, we will struggle to be truly joyful, but Paul is calling us to look somewhere different. The truth is, no matter how bad our worldly situations might be, when we look at Jesus there is always something to be joyful about, and this is what Paul is calling us to do.

Secondly Paul speaks of peace, but once again it isn't a peace that can be gained on our own. This time we not only have to focus on the God who can bring us joy and peace, but we must be actively bringing our cares and our concerns to Him. The result ought to be obvious - when you've left all your cares and concerns with an omnipotent, all-wise God, who loves you more than you'll ever understand why would you need to worry about them ever again? However this kind of peace that Paul is speaking of even goes beyond that - it 'surpasses knowledge' - it's a supernatural gift from God that will keep us from the crippling effects of anxiety in our lives.

For Discussion:

What can we practically do to foster joy and peace in our lives?

Other Verses for study:

• John 16:16-33 • Matthew 11:28-30

on prayer scattered throughout the Bible.

This is surely why our enemy is called the Father of Lies. He knows for sure that if he can convince us of something that isn't true when it comes to our understanding of God and the gospel, then this false belief will lead us down all kinds of unhelpful roads, and tie us in all kinds of knots that are impossible to break free from without winning the battle for our minds.

Therefore Paul tells us clearly - it really matters what you think about, where you focus your mind and your thoughts. What you think about is what you will become like because it will become what is most real for you, so fix your mind and thoughts on all that is holy, just and good. When you do this it will literally change you from the inside out and as Jesus Himself tells us 'the truth will set you free' (Jn 8:32).

For Discussion:

How can we practically set our minds on the right kinds of things as Paul encourages here?

Other Verses for study:

• Romans 12:1-2 • 1 Corinthians 10:3-6