

Twenty-Eight Days in Philippians

Study Four: Days Twenty-Two to Twenty-Eight

Philippians 4:1-23

Day Twenty-Two

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!

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.

V. 1 – Paul started his conclusion at the beginning of chapter three and he is still “wrapping up.” Preachers, myself included, have a hard time ending. I have tried to prepare less and less material when I speak, because I always seem to have too much! Someone once called me a “Wednesday preacher.” They meant that they still remember on Wednesday what I said on Sunday. That is because I am trying to keep it shorter and consistent with the topic.

Paul called the Philippians his “joy and crown.” He “wore” them with great affection; they were the proof of his calling and purpose. I would ask those who are “apostles” today: where is your crown, your proof? Is it a self-declared title, or is there evidence worthy of the title?

And there is only one way to stand firm and united as believers and that is “in the Lord.” It cannot be in the doctrine or the leader of a church movement. Jesus is the head of every church movement and it is only when we teach all to relate to Him that true unity can occur.

V. 2 – Uh oh. It appears that all is not perfect in Philippi. Two women were not in agreement. Agreement is hard work. It requires that everyone sit down to dialogue without any time limit on when agreement must be reached. Stephen Covey outlined seven habits for highly effective people and the fifth habit is “seek first to understand, then to be understood.” Most (but not all) disagreements are communication problems when we seek first to be understood (talk) instead of understanding (listening). Once more Paul urged that their agreement be “in the Lord.” When we are honest with one another and God, then God will be honest with us. Our dialogue must include a third person and that person is Jesus.

V. 3 – These women worked alongside Paul. Now we are into a whole other controversy in the modern church: the issue of women in the ministry. It is hard for me to imagine that God would eliminate from ministry half of humanity because they are women. William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army, used to say, “Some of my best men are women!” I don’t quite understand all the intensity that surrounds this issue. My personal guideline is simple: If God is using a women for some ministry purpose, then who am I to disagree? Jesus can build His church with whomever He chooses and it is my job to

be in agreement with them “in the Lord,” not in my personal preference or taste. My job is to help God’s servants as together we further His kingdom.

Sisters, do what God wants you to do, and do it where you are celebrated, not tolerated.

Paul referred to the workers in Philippians as “fellow yokefellows.” They were all “work animals” (oxen) under the direction of Jesus. Jesus said, “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” (Matthew 11:29-30). If your yoke isn’t easy right now, then whose yoke are you under?

Day Twenty-Three

- 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 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.

V. 4 – Paul did not simply order the Philippians to rejoice, but to rejoice in the Lord. The Philippians could not just decide to be happy, nor could they rely on circumstances for their joy. Christian joy is only found “in Christ.” It is what I call “positional” joy. If my mind and affections are set on Christ, then my joy will come from the awareness of His great love and care. My joy will remain constant because He remains constant, the same “yesterday, today and forever.” Do you have joy?

V. 5 – The Lord is near to all who call upon Him; He is close by no matter what it seems or feels like. I can accept what is happening my life and be gentle with others because the Lord is near. Does God feel far away? Then do what James instructed his readers to do: “Come near to God and he will come near to you” (James 4:8). Also, gentleness is the result of the work of the Holy Spirit in your life: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law”(Galatians 5:22-23). You cannot simply decide that you will be gentle. You must realize that you are not as gentle as God would like, that you cannot obtain that gentleness on your own, and that it will take a work of God to be gentle.

V. 6 – Paul wrote that they should be anxious for nothing. That is hard to imagine. I am anxious about a lot of things: my future, whether I will get the seat I want on the airplane, standing in lines, being on time for my next appointment, and finances, just to name a few. Why am I so anxious? I think it stems from my inadequate prayer life.

In this verse, Paul gave the antidote to anxiety and that was prayer. But it must be prayer with thanksgiving. I must be grateful for who God is and what He has done or else my prayers about things I am anxious about will simply be gripe sessions with God.

Do you want to do some study? Then get a concordance and study what Jesus had to say about prayer. Look up the words “pray,” “prayer,” and “praying” in the four gospels only. Don’t look for prayer techniques; look for prayer principles.

One time when I was a pastor, I taught a series on prayer. The people were more confused when I got done than before we started. I realized that I had dissected prayer and all its parts. Yet when all was said (little was done), it was like dissecting a frog in biology class. I had all the parts of the prayer, just like that poor frog. But there was no cohesiveness to my teaching; it was too analytical. So my definition of prayer now is “talking and listening to God.” My timetable is to pray always, without ceasing and my subject matter is anything that can make me anxious.

V. 7 – How do you know God has heard your prayer? Not when you get an answer, but when the peace of Christ rules in your heart and mind. The ultimate answer to prayer is peace, a peace that makes no sense to the natural mind. This supernatural peace will stand guard over your mind, which means that your mind must be under attack from forces and thoughts that would bring “un-peace.” Do you have peace right now in your life? Then maybe your prayer life needs attention.

Day Twenty-Four

8 Finally, brothers, 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.

V. 8 – One of the reasons I like this letter is that it is so practical. In this verse, Paul urged the readers to focus on the right “mind food.” Our minds need nourished on positive, uplifting thoughts. I have found that my mind is always working, thinking about something. If I’m not careful, I will be thinking about how angry this person made me, or how tough business is, or the wars or rumors of wars. I need to work at thinking about true (not rumors), noble (not stupid), right (not incorrect), pure (not tacky or impure), lovely (not ugly) or admirable (thoughts that others would consider worthy of imitating).

V. 9 – Another path to peace is to imitate those who are models of peace. Paul taught them to apply the practices they had seen in and received from him. Who are your mentors? Who are you emulating? Do you have peace? If not, perhaps you are too independent, without a godly model or example in your life. How can you correct that deficiency?

Day Twenty-Five

10 I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you have been 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 everything through him who gives me strength.

V. 10 – Paul now began a short teaching on giving and finances. The concern he mentioned here was financial. The Philippians didn't just pray; they also gave. Up to this point, they had no opportunity to give. If you are in the ministry, you need to give people the opportunities to express their concern through giving. Some are reluctant to do that.

A mentor told me once that people need to give more than you and I need to receive. If someone gives me ten dollars, then I have ten dollars. But if they gave it in the will of God, it will bear fruit many times over. So to not allow someone to give is to deprive them of the opportunity to reap the rewards. Often reluctance to allow someone to give is simply pride. Are you too proud to receive?

Vs. 11-13 – This passage contains a verse that is one of the most quoted in the Bible: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." But look at the context of this verse. It doesn't pertain to any great feat or spiritual duty. It is talking about provision. Paul said that he had learned a secret: that through God's strength, he could survive lean times and enjoy plenty. Paul could survive leanness and enjoy bounty because God had given him the strength to live in contentment. As I write this, the last two years have been lean financial years for me due to a job transition. But God has been faithful and I am learning to be content, which is a work of the Spirit in my heart. Are you content with what you have?

Day Twenty-Six

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 again and again when I was in need.

V. 14 – It is good to share in someone's troubles. In fact, it is a spiritual requirement. I am thinking about a parable that Jesus told:

"There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.' "But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.' "He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house, for I have five brothers. Let him warn

them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.' "Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.' "No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.' "He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'" (Luke 16:19-31).

The rich man in this parable seemed to be a righteous man, but he ended in hell because he did not use his riches to relieve the distress of others. How are you doing financially? Are you using your resources for selfish means or to help others? As I write, I am not doing a good job of distributing my resources to alleviate suffering. I need to do a better job. Help me, Lord!

Vs. 15&16 – The Philippians had made it a habit to support their brother and apostle by sending regular aid on numerous occasions. No wonder Paul loved them. No wonder he wrote this wonderful letter to them. Do you think that is a wrong way to think, that their generosity got them something special from Paul in return? Well, that very principle is biblical.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians,

Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. As it is written: "He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor; his righteousness endures forever." Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God. This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift! (2 Corinthians 9:7-15).

Notice all the good things that happened to the Corinthians because they gave:

1. They had all that they needed.
2. They abounded in every good work.
3. They were made rich in every way.
4. There was thanksgiving to God.
5. People who received their gifts prayed for them.

In some ways, the proper use of money can “buy” spiritual blessings. Does that make sense? Does that offend you? Think about it and let me know.

Day Twenty-Seven

17 Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account.

18 I have received full payment and even more; 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 his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

20 To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

V. 17 – When you are in need, it can be difficult not to look for help from somewhere, someone. But Paul did not look for the gift; he was eager for the benefit that would come to the Philippians when they gave. Spiritual benefits accrue to those who give. This reminds me of what Jesus said:

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (Matthew 6:19-21).

Where are you storing up treasures?

V. 18 – The offering that Paul received had a good fragrance before God. When something smells good, it brings joy and happiness to the one who is smelling it. This verse tells us that God is pleased when we give with right motives.

V. 19 – Paul declared that God would supply all their needs because they were generous and gracious to remember him when they gave. That could seem boastful, that he was so important that God would bless anyone who gave to Paul. But Paul understood the principles of sowing and reaping, and he was just stating a fact about the return for any giver. If your needs aren't being met, how generous have you been recently? Have you violated the principle of sowing first and then reaping a reward?

V. 20 – Paul probably dictated this letter to someone and this brings the letter to an end. Lest the focus be on him or the Philippians, Paul ended with an exhortation to give God glory. Paul began and ended putting the spotlight on God and Jesus. The word "glory" literally means "excellence." May all of us do all we can to worship God for the excellence He deserves, and may we not do anything to take away from that excellence.

Day Twenty-Eight

21 Greet all the saints in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me send greetings.

22 All the saints send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar's household.

23 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.

V. 21 – Some believe that Paul added these last verses in his own handwriting. Paul obviously wanted this letter read to the church and added his personal greeting to all. I can see the letter being read publicly and the Philippians smiling as they read. I wonder if he sent it back with Epaphroditus when he returned to Philippi?

V. 22 – Paul mentioned Caesar’s household, the only such mention in his letters. As we pointed out in the introduction, there were many Roman citizens and army veterans who lived in Philippi. Any mention of Rome and its government would have been met with keen interest from the Philippians. And here we see that Paul has made evangelistic inroads with the personal household of the emperor himself. Paul was a magnificent apostle, who was effective in whatever he did. Next to Jesus, no one did more for the New Testament church than Paul, then or now.

I want to be more effective in reaching the people in my cultural institutions, even government. Even in prison, Paul was effective, writing letters and reaching the Roman guards and officials. What a legacy he left us! Are we living up to it?

V. 23 – In verse 20, Paul wrote of glory, in this verse on grace. In verse 20, he mentioned the Father, in this verse Jesus. Were these just idle words or polite closings? No, they were filled with meaning. When you say “God bless you,” do you mean it? Or have you picked up phrases that have religious content but no potency to bring about what they say?

As we close this study, I trust that you have enjoyed this letter to Paul’s favorite church. Paul certainly did love these people and this letter is personal and intimate. I pray that God will give all of us this kind of relationship with someone from whom we can receive and to whom we can give. May the Lord bless you as you study this letter again and again. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you and yours. Amen!