

Essays in Philippians 14- The Path to Peace

Phil. 4:4-7

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We experienced a great deal of turmoil in 2020. A pandemic upended our world. It has affected every aspect of our lives. People have gotten sick. Many have died. People's livelihoods have been negatively impacted by the virus. Also, there has been an increase in social disorder. People continue to mistreat their neighbors based on race, class, and politics. While there are some encouraging signs that 2021 will be better, we still have some uneasiness about the future.

In times of uncertainty and distress, we anxiously search for peace. We desperately want reassurance that we will be ok. Today, people are as eager as ever to find peace. From a pandemic to social disorder, we want solutions to our problems. But, where can we go to find peace? In the following text, Paul shows the Philippians the path to peace.

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:4-7).

First, Paul tells the Philippians to rejoice in the Lord. He is emphatic in this command. We are always to rejoice in the Lord. But, why? The Lord's blessings are unchanging. The circumstances of our lives may change, but the blessings of Jesus will not. His blessings are not in question.

However, notice that Paul tells us where joy is found: in the Lord. Unless and until we get in the Lord, we will never know the joy of which he writes. We get into the Lord by obedient faith. For example, the Roman soldier and his household at Philippi got into the Lord by believing in Jesus and being baptized (Acts 16:30-33). This is how we get into the Lord. In so doing, we can rejoice.

Secondly, Paul tells the Philippians to be known for their reasonableness or forbearance. If we want peace, we must learn to be reasonable and forbearing with one another. In times of distress, we can become unreasonable and overbearing. Some snap under the strain of a difficult situation. If left unchecked, pent-up stress can vent out of us through anger. Such aggression will only cause additional harm to difficult situations.

The joyful disposition of Christians can bring calm to a storm. They can bring quiet to chaos. Finding solutions in a time of crisis is challenging. Dominant personalities with opposing perspectives can make a difficult situation worse. They can tear apart each other and the church. To prevent this, we must be tempered by brotherly love. Forbearance will keep us together. What matters most is that we help each other get to Heaven.

Third, Paul reminds the Philippians that the Lord is at hand. In a time of crisis, we can lose sight of the Lord. He can seem distant when our world is turned upside down and inside out. When we witness injustice or experience suffering, we may wonder if Jesus cares. Like the martyred saints beneath the altar, we may cry out, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" (Rev. 6:10).

Questioning the care of the Lord during a crisis is not unusual. A psalmist once questioned the Lord, "Awake! Why are you sleeping, O Lord? Rouse yourself! Do not reject us forever! Why do you hide your face? Why do you forget our affliction and oppression? For our soul is bowed down to the dust; our belly clings to the ground. Rise up; come to our help! Redeem us for the sake of your steadfast love!" (Psa. 44:23-26).

The apostles would unknowingly reenact this psalm during a storm on the Sea of Galilee with Jesus: "But he (Jesus) was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. And they woke him and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" (Mark 4:38).

Of course, God cared that the psalmist and his countrymen were being led like sheep to the slaughter. Jesus cared that the apostles were in danger. Most importantly, Jesus cares about us. In times of crisis, we need to be reminded of the Lord's love and care for us. He is not distant. He is near. He is not blissfully unaware of our plight. He is concerned and wants to help us. If we reach out to Him, He will take our hand and lead us.

Fourth, Paul tells the Philippians to be anxious for nothing. Anxiety is like a boulder in the path of peace. Until it is crushed and removed, we will never have peace. We can become consumed by life. As Jesus warned in the Parable of the Sower, the cares of daily life can choke God's word out of us (Matt. 13:22). Anxiety causes us to look inward to solve our problems instead of looking God-ward. Anxiety harms faith.

Instead of relying on ourselves, we must learn to trust God to guide us. To this end, Paul offers a practical action to cope with anxiety: prayer. Prayer will help develop humility and strengthen faith. If we seek God's kingdom first and trust His grace, He will lead us to peace.

Conclusion

Everyone wants to find calm in times of trouble. The instructions of this paragraph represent stepping-stones on the path to peace. If we are so bold as to take these steps of faith, Paul promises that the immeasurable peace of God will guard our hearts and minds.

Gaining the peace of God will involve sacrifice and reconciliation. The anxiety we frequently have in our lives is the result of mismanaging priorities. We will have to sacrifice to put God first in our lives. Also, gaining the peace of God will involve reconciliation with Him and those we have harmed. While this is challenging, peaceful reconciliation will give us a family of faith to help us to Heaven.

Experiencing the peace of God will not just bring us joy. His peace will enable us to grow in His image and reflect His glory in the world. This will help us bring God's peace into the lives of others.