

CONFIDENT IN GOD TO KNOW THE PEACE OF GOD

INTRODUCTION

How can we know the peace of God at a time like this, when the foundation of our society seems to be collapsing around us?

It can be very difficult and in this passage before us we see three things are set before us that will rob us of that peace.

The first is not being at peace with others, that affects our relationship with God and we will see the seriousness of it. The second is anxiety, that thing that grips our hearts and our minds sending them off into all sorts of different directions causing fear and unrest. The third is what we allow to enter our minds, what we focus on if it is the right things we can know the God of peace is with us if the wrong things we can really struggle in our Christian lives.

So the first point:

PEACE WITH EACH OTHER

We are given an insight in these first two verses into the church at Philippi and two people in that church in particular: Euodia and Syntyche who obviously have problems with each other.

We are not told the problem they have but it is unlikely it is a serious doctrinal issue, that is because of the way Paul deals

with this here and the way he deals with other issues in his other letters, if he thinks there is a threat to the unity of the church because of some particular doctrine he tells them about it and what to be aware of and how to avoid it. We have seen that in chapter 3, he was scathing of those who were coming in and tempting people to rely on their own works before God calling them dogs.

Here we see how he deals with two people who have fallen out but not over a major doctrine, we don't know what it is and it is important but it isn't a major doctrinal matter.

These two women for whatever reason don't get on. And that will not do. It affects the whole church. That is why Paul makes his appeal to them in a letter addressed to the church.

They should be at peace with each other and they are not.

So what do we learn from Paul?

His language is strong isn't it? He pleads with both of them individually to agree in the Lord. He pleads with Euodia and he pleads with Syntyche.

Not putting one above the other, or taking sides, but appealing to them to sort the problem out.

Then he asks others to help them, and they probably need it, it is obviously a public issue, it has reached Paul the church know about it, now he says loyal yokefellow, Paul here maybe

addressing somebody by name, as is suggested in the NIV text note, but whether he is or not he is appealing to someone to help them, because it is an important issue in the church.

He reminds this helper that these women are not trouble causers but are those who have stood alongside Paul in the work of the gospel, they are godly women, who are serving God, fellow workers with Paul whose names are written in the book of life.

And they should be a peace with each other. He has already made a general appeal for this in chapter 2 and here he makes it personal. Agree with each other in the Lord.

How important is it that we agree in the Lord, very, Paul here appeals to two people whose falling out affects the rest of the family.

It is vital for our witness as a church that we agree, who do you struggle with? When you speak to others in the church is there a tendency to pull someone down?

I found this helpful illustration in a book

If there is one thing more than another required in the church of God today, it is that we present a united front to the enemy. There is a great need of aggressive unity. Just before the battle of Trafalgar, Nelson inquired of Admiral

Collingwood where his captain was, and learned that he and captain Rotherham were not on good terms with each other. Sending a boat for the captain, he placed the hands of Rotherham and Collingwood together, pointed to the enemy's ships, and earnestly looking them both in the face, he uttered the simple words: 'Look, yonder is the enemy.' It was enough; disagreements were forgotten, and victory was gained.

Remember we are all capable of being a Euodia or Syntyche and we need to recognise the importance of now being at peace with others. It maybe you need some help, someone to pray with someone to help you see the other person from God's perspective a yokefellow, it maybe that at some point you have to ask for their forgiveness to route out the bitterness. The worse thing to do is let it fester and pretend it doesn't matter.

That is the link to the next point the peace of God, what robs us of that peace is our tendency to ponder on our circumstances, to let our troubles fester.

So we see Paul's plea for peace with each other next we see how the peace of God can guard our hearts and minds, even in difficult circumstances.

THE PEACE OF GOD

In verses 4-7 Paul gives us the recipe for the peace of God.

Now what robs us of this peace is our hearts and our minds, when we are anxious about things it is our hearts and minds that wonder, off they go, thinking through different scenarios, solutions, ideas, fears, our hearts sink when we think of the situation, our minds start down a path we don't want them to go down and we know we are trapped.

The problem isn't the situation it is what we make of the situation; how our hearts and minds think of the situation.

First of all it is worth noting that we will all face difficult situations in life, we will all have to deal with things we don't want to deal with, it maybe a job loss or the loss of a family member or close friend. It may be something medical, either for us or for someone we care for.

It may not be that definable, we just feel down we don't know why we can't put our finger on it but it is there within us and our hearts and our minds wonder. We call all sorts of things into question, we can wonder what good it is having a faith that leaves us feeling like this. We can then feel guilty because we know it says in Philippians 4:4 rejoice in the lord always, but we are not able to do that. And to try and do it feels fake. We cannot rejoice.

But if we think we are being told to rejoice we have missed the most important point.

Paul says rejoice in the Lord always. That is what makes the difference. Because we lift our heads to him, we think about him, who he is what he has done. We remember Jesus, what

he has done for us, we have seen it in this very letter, we are saved by trusting him, and that is always worth rejoicing over. He is the one who gave his life for us, to open the way to the Father.

It is worth reminding ourselves of where Paul was when he wrote these words and what awaited him, we know from chapter 1 he was in prison awaiting trial to find out if he would live or die.

From here comes the command to rejoice. He isn't saying it to pile the guilt on. He has the interests of his friends at heart, **verse 1** those whom he loves and longs for.

You know if we feel trapped by verses like this it can be because we don't understand the motivation behind them.

Paul says this because it is the best thing for us to do. It isn't something that is impossible. But you know it is made harder if we buy into the world's lie that happiness comes through being free from pain and suffering. That we can only truly rejoice when things are going well. If that is what we think we aren't rejoicing in the Lord but in our own circumstances.

The peace of God starts with rejoicing in the Lord.

Second it comes through gentleness and a realisation that the lord is near.

We don't have too much time to look at it now because there is so much here but Paul says work on that inner quality of

gentleness it is part of the fruit of the spirit that the Holy Spirit produces in us. Paul says it should be evident to all. We should want to be known for it, it should be our ambition, to have a gentleness of spirit. It is another of those easy to understand hard to do verses isn't it?

Then we start to get to the heart of the problem. Anxiety

Do not be anxious about anything. But notice Paul again doesn't stop there. He goes on to tell us how this anxiety that we can often have no control over because we are driven by our heart and mind can be broken, how we can know the peace of God when naturally we would be anxious.

He gives us a specific thing to do when our hearts and minds start to wonder.

Tell God about it. Do you do that? Do you lift it before him, tell him of the situation?

He goes further and gives us practical advice.

Prayer and petition **verse 6** approaching him in the right way, we don't come moaning and grumbling.

As we approach him in prayer we worship, we think of him, we dwell on who he is, meditate on him, and we also thank him, and that here is very important. You may say I have tried praying about these things and it makes no difference.

You know prayer isn't the answer.

That may sound like a strange thing to say but it is God who grants the peace. What I mean is this if prayer is the thing we do to get the anxiety off our chest; we probably won't know the peace of God. It isn't about us trying to get ourselves out of a difficult situation; the gospel is never that, neither is that how we apply the gospel to our lives. It is God who saves us and it is God who gives us peace.

So the right approach to the God who can help us is with thanksgiving. Do you feel like doing that when you are anxious no, but let's not forget who it is we come before; the God who we owe everything to, our creator the one who has given us life, the one who has saved us in Jesus. He is worthy of our thanks and Paul says thanksgiving is a very important part of our prayer when we are seeking the peace of God.

Now we are able to present our request before him. And as we do we see this great promise of scripture. **The peace of God which transcends understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus**

Do you see what God does he guards the very things that wonder off and cause our anxiety. Our hearts and our minds, he through his peace puts a fence around them and stops them going off.

We can't understand it, it is a promise of scripture. If you want to look deeper into this maybe it is something you particularly struggle with. I found this book particularly helpful.

So knowing the peace of God instead of anxiety. There are times when God meets us as we ask him to and we are aware of it a peace that passes understanding.

Our third point the:

THE GOD OF PEACE

The promise here that he is with us when we focus our minds on the pure, the admirable etc.

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.

Again we see the practical application of Paul to the Philippians. What we allow to enter our minds can rob us of our peace or can lead to it.

If we focus on what is wrong, what is filthy, what is horrible, what is nasty, we can be robbed of our peace.

Paul doesn't say that here but it is the opposite of what he does say isn't it?

How important are these words in any generation but especially this one, the age of the television.

The challenge is this do we regulate our minds are we prepared to put up with almost anything?

Where is our line?

We all have one. I won't watch that, or I won't think about that but where is it for you and is it in the place it should be. Are we aimlessly being robbed of peace because we don't think about where that line is for us?

Now I don't think the application here is completely remove yourself from the world so you don't know what is going on. Christianity is never that. Jesus came into the world and he expects us to go into it and not naively.

But you know I really don't think that is the problem for today's church. We are in danger of being so immersed in the world that people can't tell any difference.

Where do we draw the line?

Then as we look at these verses how do we apply them to our lives?

How do we make sure our minds are being filled with the right things?

Well it is amazing how often reading the bible and meditating on it comes up even when it doesn't explicitly say it isn't it. But that is part of the right application for us here. Scripture memorisation is so brilliant because you can recall it anytime you like. I often do it when I am trying to get to sleep or when I am driving. It focuses the mind.

You may have never learnt a verse of scripture by actively memorising it. You can pick a few up if you are in the church long enough but to sit down and as an exercise to learn a verse or two is far better than a lot of other things we do. If you have never done it or even if you have; here is some very specific application for you this week. Learn this verse **verse 8** There are a lot of whatever's so not too difficult and we will say it together next Sunday morning. Say it at least once everyday. So that when we come back next Sunday and we say it together it will be natural. If we have people here next week who aren't there today it will encourage them when they here us say it together so don't worry about that. Let's use the NIV so we all say the same thing, if you use a different translation at home you may want to jot it down before you go. But let's do it.

CONCLUSION

Peace with each other, the peace of God from anxiety and thinking about what is right.

What is the result, what is the aim of all of this? Is it just obedience because God tells us to, there would be nothing wrong if it was.

But it is so much more than that.

Verse 9 shows us the heart of Paul shared with those he loves if we do these things, like he does he sets himself up as an example again for us, because he is sharing with his friends what it is like to have the God of peace with him.

That is the aim that we may know the God of peace with us.

As we apply not just this chapter but what we have learnt through this book with Paul as our example we can know the God of peace. His promise is to be with us.

Whatever situations we face, in this current economic climate may others see how we act and be able to say there is something different about you and when they say what it is you can say the God of peace is with me.