

People of Peace

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 28 August 2016

Preacher: Alex Newenham

[0 : 00] for verses 2 to 9, I think. Yeah, so that's on page 1180 of the Red Bible. So, I plead with you, Odea, and I plead with Sintica to agree with each other in the Lord.

Yes, and I asked you, loyal Yoke Fellow, 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.

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again, rejoice. Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your request to God.

And the peace of God which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. 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.

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. Thanks, Kate.

[1 : 29] If you'd like to just keep your Bibles open, we're going to be referring back and forth within the Book of Philippians for the next while. So, yeah, just before I start, I'd just like to thank you for your prayers during the week.

Yeah, they do mean a lot, and they have helped me. I've, as always, when I'm preparing, I do enjoy the preparation. Christine might in degree with all the stress that's in the house, but I do enjoy the time that I get to spend really delving into God's Word and thinking through it and thinking how to apply it into my own life.

But as we start, just to refer back to last week with Ralph, we left it with Ralph encouraging us to stand firm in the Lord, and that's where today's passage starts from.

A quick glance back to chapter 1. Verse 1 will remind us who Paul is writing to. So let's pop back there for a second and have a look at that. And it starts by saying, to all God's holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers, or elders, and deacons.

So, this is a letter to Christians, followers of Jesus, who are committed to the local church and to the spread of the Gospel. They are partners with Paul in the Gospel.

[2 : 54] Verse 1, or verse 5, because of your partnership in the Gospel from the first day until now. So they're partners with Paul, and he loves them in verse 7 and 8.

This love is also expressed in the deepest sense in the beginning of this chapter, chapter 4, that we're going to spend today looking at. Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and my crown.

So it's important to keep all of that in the back of our minds as we look at the next few verses.

Because if we don't understand the context or the background of this chapter, and the relationship with Paul, we could easily think that Paul is on their back, and that he's nitpicking.

Because there's some hard things that he has to say to them this morning. So preparing this talk this morning, I considered entitling it Three Easy Steps to Be a Miserable Christian.

Those three easy steps are keep bickering, dwell on everything bad in your life, worry about it, and be anxious all the time. Three, think and ponder on everything that pops into your mind, especially the really bad stuff.

[4 : 12] And don't try and be like Paul, because he was an apostle, and I'm only weak little me. Now I know that's four, and I said that there would only be three, but sure, if we're going to be miserable Christians, we may as well have four things to grumble about instead of three.

But Paul is actually building on from what we looked at last week. He explains to us how to stand firm. And not only that, but how to enjoy the power of God at work in us. He gives us some very useful advice as to how we can guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus from verse 7, and how to enjoy the peace of God. Basically the opposites of the list I just mentioned.

So as a brief outline, so we know where we're going this morning, and when I'm finally going to sit down again, I've divided the passage into six sections. Unity in the church family, peace in our relationships, peace in our circumstances, peace in our thoughts, peace in our behavior, and finally the blessings of peace.

So firstly, unity. Unity in the church family. You can't stand together if you're divided. Paul loves them dearly. That isn't just a feeling for Paul.

[5 : 27] It's also a model for us to have towards each other. If Paul's love for the church in Philippi is a model for how we should love each other, then any division among us is scandalous.

We can't be at odds with each other and be in God's family. When I was in school, there was twin boys in my class. They seemed to absolutely hate each other.

They must have come out of the womb with bruises because they were always fighting. When we went to rugby training, they had to be separated more than once per training session. They tore lumps out of each other each week.

The awkward thing about that was that they played scrum half and out half. If you don't understand rugby, well then, it's enough to say that these two positions are probably the two key positions on the field.

The relationship between these two positions is vital to gelling the team together. It was important that they got on well on the pitch. These two guys were brilliant rugby players. I think one of them went on to play for Munster B.

[6 : 35] Really good rugby players. But if you put them together on a pitch, together with the ball in their hand, the school jersey, and the crest on their chest, they would boss the game.

Their telepathy or their understanding of each other was amazing. They both knew where the other one was all the time. You see, when they had to come together and unite around the common goal of winning the match, they put whatever differences they had aside and use their understanding of each other to do great things on the rugby pitch for the team.

Now please don't misunderstand me or mishear me because that is just a funny story which happens to be true, but I don't think it's okay to fall out with each other and box the head off each other from Monday to Saturday as long as we can unite once a week for our weekly gathering or distribute calendars together at Christmas time.

If there is disunity in the church, how can we stand together against the enemy outside? Paul addresses two women here specifically, Euodia and Syntyche, who seem to have fallen out over something.

Verse 2, I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you, my true companion, to help these women since they have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers whose names are in the Book of Life.

[8 : 06] These women weren't the quiet ones who came to church regularly and didn't do much out of the way. These women were active members of the church. They were regular at meetings.

They were on the set-up rota. They helped at creche. They visited the sick. They delivered magazines and calendars. They welcomed people at the door. They were intentional in their day-to-day relationships to talk to people about Jesus.

They were contenders with Paul in the cause of the gospel. The very fact that Paul mentions them suggests that he had heard of their bickering through the grapevine.

Now, he doesn't mention the issue that's between them or does he take it aside to say who he thinks is at fault? He pleads equally. Look where it says it there.

He pleads equally with Euodia and he pleads with Syntyche to be of the same mind. Alec Mottier, who incidentally went home to heaven just this past Friday, he wrote a commentary on Philippians.

[9 : 08] And it says, To agree on the gospel is the most fundamental form of unity. It involves a unity of mind and heart as to the doctrine and personal experience of salvation.

To agree on what the gospel demands in its proclamation to the world is to cement unity by common action. The singleness of the task ought to be reflected in the singleness of the workers. The singleness of the task ought to be reflected in the singleness of the workers. So it's important that we get along. In fact, it's important too that we help each other get along.

Look again at what Paul says. Yes, and I ask you, my true companion, to help these women. He doesn't say to wait until they sort it out themselves.

He encourages his companion to help them. Now this true companion is referred to differently in different translations. Some translations call him Synzegos.

[10:17] You can understand why that didn't make it into most named books. Synzegos. But he's also referred to here more helpfully as Yokefellow. It's a far more helpful title as it describes a person who pulls well in a harness made for two.

A Yokefellow. He is motivated by the gospel like Paul is. They both share the desire to have Christ proclaimed by word and action and will kick against anything that hampers that work.

So this companion is charged with helping these two women to get along. Now I can understand how we can fall out. We can say something which is misunderstood. We can break trust with a brother or a sister.

We can fail to see how we might have offended someone. Relationships can become tangled. We can lash out at someone and find it hard to make things right again.

There's nothing that Satan loves more than to see disunity among God's people. Paul is very careful here by not mentioning the specific dispute between these two women because it leaves room for us to fill in our own details.

[11:34] He also leaves anonymous the Yokefellow. We can fill in our own names in there too. If we see relationships strained within the church we have a duty to help. Not sticking our noses just to get the lowdown on who said what and who did what but to get alongside the hurt parties and try and work a way forward.

United in the gospel for the purpose of building God's people we want to be people who see our sin who deal with it. Putting it to death and rejoicing together in the forgiveness offered to us by Jesus. Bathing in the grace that comes from our identity in Christ as forgiven people. We want to be people who are quick to go to each other and ask for forgiveness when we have hurt someone and pray together thanking God that because he has made us new in Christ we can extend that same forgiveness to each other.

Asking God to heal the hurt and the broken trust and restore the relationship. If there is disunity in the church how can we stand together against the enemy outside?

And how can we show people Christ if we are bickering inside just like the world? Paul gives us four helpful prompts.

[12:55] Peace in our relationships. Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again. Rejoice. From verse 4.

Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything but in every situation by prayer and petition with thanksgiving present your request to God and the peace of God which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers and sisters 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.

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. At first glance this seems like a ridiculous statement.

Rejoice in the Lord always. Remember Paul is in chains he's in prison and he's encouraging them to rejoice. You could be forgiven for thinking that it's just a typo and what Paul really meant to say was grumble to the Lord when things don't go your way but at all other times then it's okay to rejoice.

[14:15] But expecting that we might think that Paul repeats it so that we don't miss it. He says rejoice. He says it again. Surely not Paul.

Not when we're bickering with fellow believers. You don't know how much they've hurt me. We can't be expected to rejoice. Surely not when we're stuck when you're stuck in chains in prison.

Surely not when we are just exhausted because we've been up half the night with a screaming child. Surely Paul you can't expect either the Philippians or us to rejoice when you really don't

understand what we have to put up with on a daily basis.

We have a boss that we don't like. A job that we can't stand. Or no job when we can't seem to find one. A spouse who we don't get on with anymore.

Pain that is unbearable and daily. Habits which we can't break. Financial worries which seem like they have no solution. And that's just our situations.

[15 : 18] How can we rejoice when the world is in turmoil? When terrorism abounds? When earthquakes wipe out entire cities? When religious intolerance and fear prevent us from wearing what we like at the beach?

The list goes on. With such persecution for people of faith in Jesus people facing death because they preach Jesus as Lord.

Surely Paul you don't mean this message for us. Rejoice in the Lord always. I find it hard enough to do it once a week on a Sunday with music to help. But of course as we have already seen in the earlier chapters Paul is all too aware of what's going on around him.

He knows his own past sins. We see that in chapter 3 verse 6. So he knows how bad he really is. His friends are really suffering.

We saw that in chapter 1 verses 29 and 30 where it says for it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him but also to suffer for him since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

[16 : 42] Paul himself is a prisoner and facing the possibility of death and yet he rejoices and tells us to do and others to do likewise.

We see here that circumstances don't determine the condition of the heart and mind. As Christians we can be joyful inside when all around us is dark or in turmoil.

That joy comes from the security of life with Christ. We looked at that a few weeks ago in chapter 3 verse 9 where Paul says not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law but that which is through faith in Christ.

Christ. We are made right with God because and only through Jesus. Not on our own merits. That's good news.

That's why we rejoice. Verse 5 carries on. Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. The word gentleness here could have been translated.

[17 : 46] This is a big long list so listen up. The word gentleness could have been translated in many different ways. It could have been translated as big hearted, forbearance, yieldedness, geniality, kindness, sweet reasonableness, considerateness, charitableness, mildness, magnanimity, generosity.

The point is that the Christian cannot keep the secrets of this happiness to himself. He needs to be other centred. In fact we mentioned that also a few weeks ago in chapter 2 verse 3 when talking about being one in spirit and of one mind.

It says do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, rather in humility value others above yourself. Not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of others.

We need to be striving to be a blessing to others, all others, not just fellow believers, because all of this is said in the context of the Lord being near, meaning he will come again soon.

We know that the promises of God to his people will become reality. Believers, in spite of persecution and suffering, can afford to be mild and charitable in their relation to others, because we know that this world and our time in it is fleeting.

[19 : 07] So how we conduct ourselves is important. How we respond to life's ups and downs is witnessed and noticed. How we work out our differences, how we challenge each other in love is seen.

So let's be gentle. Jesus is coming. How he will rejoice in us if he finds us rejoicing in him, being content to be like him.

Peace in our circumstances. If the rules for our relationships were to rejoice in the Lord, then the rules for our circumstances are much easier. Paul clearly says to us what the cure for worry or anxiety is.

Did you spot it? What's the remedy for worry? Anybody? Verse 6, do not be anxious about anything.

The cure for worry? Don't worry. Easy. Right, so let's move on. That's peace in our circumstances towards it. But of course, it's not that easy, is it?

[20 : 16] The eagle-eyed of you will have seen or remember Paul himself already saying in chapter 2, verse 28, speaking of Epaphroditus, who had been very unwell, and who Paul was now eager to send back to the Philippians.

It says there, verse 28 of chapter 2, so that when you, speaking of the Philippians, see him again, you may be glad, and I may have less anxiety.

Is Paul breaking his own rules? He says do not worry, and here he is anxious himself. Double standards, perhaps? Well, of course not. This is Paul.

There is such a thing as kindly concern, or a genuine interest in the welfare of others, like Timothy had for Philippians in chapter 2, verse 20. He says, I have no one else like him who will show genuine concern for your welfare.

But there is also the type of worry or anxiety which is to be unduly concerned about something. For example, food, drink, clothes, or how long we'll live, or the future, or, I don't know, you fill in the blank, what do you worry about?

[21 : 26] Paul does give us a remedy, though. But in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

The cure for worry is prayer. The beginning of the enjoyment of peace is thanksgiving. These two go together, prayer and thanksgiving.

In prayer, we are simply a child coming to our father, asking him for help. Nothing more, nothing less. As we thank God for all he has done, we begin to accept the worrying circumstances as something which God has actually appointed.

After all, he is all-wise, he is all-loving, and he is all-sovereign. In prayer, anxiety is resolved by trust in God.

The thing which causes us to worry in the first place is brought to God, the one who is totally competent, and in whose hands the issue can be left. When we worry, what we are asking is how.

[22 : 45] How will I cope? How will I survive? How will I persevere? Prayer takes those questions and points away from us to God.

Let me say that again with an illustration. Prayer takes those questions and points away from us and up to God, to God's resources and to God's promises.

We'll be mentioning those promises a little bit later on. When we worry, we also ask the question, why? Why has this happened to me? Why does God allow these things happen?

Thanksgiving takes the question of why and points us again to God, the one who is sovereign and works all things for good for those who love him?

God never acts without purpose. His purposes never fail. Thanksgiving requires humility, submitting to his will and acknowledging that his ways are best, even when, and especially when, we can't see the end to the problems.

[23 : 57] Peace in our thoughts. verse 8. Finally, brothers and sisters, 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.

Think about such things. What does that mean? Paul is describing a deeper kind of thinking here. He wants us to think deeply about the things mentioned. If someone asked you to think deeply about something, how would you go about doing it?

How do you think deeply about something? Well, can I make some suggestions? Because I didn't know how to answer that question either. Can I suggest that it means to meditate on, to really ponder, to give proper weight and consideration and time to let it sink in, and then to allow the results to really influence the way we live our life?

Let these things in this list, let these types of things be what we think about in the quieter times of the day. When the kids have gone to bed and we're tempted to go channel hopping, or when we peruse through the magazines, when we fill our eyes and our minds with unhelpful images or unattainable items or fashions, the books we read, the websites we revert to to kill a few minutes, an earthly mind is a quick path to the downward path of destruction.

However, a mind disciplined in the things of God and of which he approves is the steadiest way to practical holiness. By giving attention to things of which God approves, like what's listed above, we will shape our minds to be like him.

[25 : 46] This requires discipline. These kind of thoughts don't come easy. The Philippians, if we remember from chapter 3, verses 18 to 19, we're a morally dubious bunch.

Let's read that together. 3, 18. For as I have often told you before and now tell you again, even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ.

Their destiny is destruction, their God is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things.

We too, like them, can have our heads turned to things of the world. So again, Paul gives us a remedy. 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 these things.

If we're not sure what those things are exactly, let's look at the kind of things that Paul has already mentioned. Chapter 3, verse 10. I want to know Christ, yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so somehow attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

[27 : 07] Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.

Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it, but one thing I do, forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead, I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Jesus is Paul's sole focus in life. His letters to all the churches are encouraging them to keep on with Jesus. Back in the beginning of Philippians, he says in his opening address from verse 9, and this is my prayer, that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God. What is true? What is noble? What is right or pure or lovely or admirable? What is excellent or praiseworthy? Think about these things. Let our thoughts and our conversations, our motivations and our deepest longings be about Jesus.

Peace in our behaviour. We have heard twice in this series from the latter part of chapter 2 and last week in the latter part of chapter 3 the importance of role models. Chapter 2 mentioned Timothy and Epaphroditus.

[28 : 41] Here Paul says in verse 9, whatever you have learned or received or heard from me or seen in me, put it into practice.

Now of course we didn't know Paul like the Philippians did. So how does this apply to us? Well we have learned and received God's word from Paul. We have seen how he reacted in different situations.

He writes with the very authority of the word of God. Paul's words are God's words. to us. He practiced what he preached. So when he tells us to put into practice what we have learned or received or heard from him, he isn't on some kind of ego trip where he wants lots of clones of himself.

He is speaking with apostolic authority. Paul's words are God's words and that is why we should listen to him and obey what he says.

In the previous section on our thoughts, the thinking and meditation he was talking about isn't just theoretical and abstract. This verse shows us that we are to think with purpose and the purpose leads to action.

[29 : 52] William Hendrickson in his commentary on Philippians put it this way, true believers hear, they meditate until they understand, then they act upon it, putting it into constant practice, thereby showing that their house was built upon the rock of Jesus.

How do we wrestle with scripture? How do we meditate on it? Do we let it sink deep into our hearts and our minds? Do we consider what we have just read or heard and how we can become more like Jesus by carrying out what we have just read or heard?

Is the Bible just a book that we read on a Sunday morning? As we come towards the conclusion, let me share a funny story I heard recently remembering the game Simon Says.

You all remember the game? The game went something like this. Simon Says pat your head and you all pat your head. Simon Says jump on one leg and you all jumped on one leg.

Well, it's a simple game but the Bible is like that too but we've tended to make it more complicated than that. The Bible says, therefore God says, be of the same mind.

[31 : 06] Verse 2. God says, rejoice in the Lord always. Verse 4. God says, let your gentleness be evident to all.

Verse 5. God says, do not be anxious. Verse 6. God says, put into practice. Verse 9. God says, present your requests.

Pray. Verse 6 again. Think about these things. Verse 8. God says, put into practice. Verse 9. All of these are God says statements. There's no tricky little Simon says bluffs where Simon doesn't say it.

God does say these things. This is God's word and he does say it. Can you imagine if you said to your child, go and clean your room. And they went off, came back an hour later and said, mom, dad, I heard what you said and I even memorised it.

Go and clean your room, they said. What you said was so good, I even used it as a caption for my latest Facebook status. Well, you'd be disgusted, wouldn't you?

[32 : 13] We expect our child to go and clean their room when we tell them to go and clean their room. If we are followers of Jesus, we can't just memorise scripture or learn it in Greek.

We need to be doers of Jesus' words. Now, this all sounds pretty strict and pretty hard. How am I meant to do all of these things that we looked at this morning?

Or the things that we learnt last week? Or all the rules in the other parts of the Bible? Leviticus itself would make my head melt. We already know how impossible the Ten Commandments are to keep.

Thankfully, we have good news. We have missed out two major promises. Am I up to date? Yes.

We have missed out two major promises in this passage.

The key to the whole talk this morning. Look with me again at verse seven for the first promise. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation by prayer and petition with thanksgiving present your request to God and the peace of God which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

[33 : 38] With all of these rules there's a promise, a promise of blessing. When we look for peace in our relationships, the rule is to rejoice in the Lord and bear with each other.

When we seek the Lord first and foremost and before anyone else, when he is our joy, when we bear with each other because our identity is in Christ Jesus, then the promise is that we'll have the peace of God which transcends all understanding.

When we look for peace in our circumstances, the promise is that the peace of God will guard our hearts and minds from worry when we bring things to God in prayer and thanksgiving.

The second promise and the God of peace will be with you. The end of verse nine and the God of peace will be with you.

When we look for peace in our thoughts, when we focus on the things of which he approves, which will make us more like him, the peace will be with us.

[34 : 49] When we look for peace in our behavior, when we seek to live the life of which God approves, the promise is that the God of peace will be with us.

These rules aren't actually all that daunting because let's face this, we can't keep them. We are going to fail if we just go off and try and keep them on our own strength.

But be encouraged this morning. As we go, the God of peace goes with us. Paul tells us in verse 9 to put it into practice. He doesn't expect us to do it all perfectly, but to practice.

And as we practice godly living, the God of peace is with us. There are many things which will distract us. The world is full of distractions.

If as a church we are to stand firm in the world, we must be united and help each other to be so. We must model our relationships on Christ, surround our circumstances, be they good or bad, with prayer and thanksgiving, train our minds in godly thinking, and be constantly subjecting our life to the word of God.

[36 : 06] do this, and the peace of God will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, and the God of peace will be with us.

But be warned, if we ignore the rules, we must be prepared to forego the blessings. Let us pray. Heavenly Father, we are thankful this morning for this book.

Thank you for the series on Philipians over these last few months. Lord, thank you for the obedience that Paul has shown us, the model that he is.

Thank you for the example of rejoicing in hard situations which he models for us. We realise there are tough challenges in this passage. Help us to be people of peace.

Help us to reach out in broken relationships and bring your healing. Help us to