

The Surpassing Peace Of God

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[0 : 00] Please take your Bibles and open them up this morning to the book of Philippians. And today we're in chapter 4, verses 2 through 9 of Philippians. And just a note for you as you prepare to worship next week, we're going to take just a one-week break from Philippians for a Christmas message next week from Matthew chapter 1.

So as you prepare for next week, just take note of that. But this week we're in chapter 4, verses 2 through 9 of Philippians. And so when you've found it in your Bibles, if you would, let's please stand in honor of the reading of God's Word this morning.

Paul says, I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women who have labored side by side with me in the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.

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. Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, 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.

[1 : 44] What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you. This is God's holy word.

Let's pray once more. Lord, we thank you for your word. We thank you for what Paul's written here for us. And we ask simply, Father, would you speak to us today through your word?

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Well, one thing I think we can say for certain, as we reflect on the events of Christmas, and as we look to our passage this morning, is this.

God desires for his people to have peace. God desires for you, and for me, to have peace this Christmas season.

The birth of Christ is the birth of the Prince of Peace. We just read this passage from Isaiah 9. And I want to remind us of it again. His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and the Prince of Peace.

[2 : 49] It says of the increase of his government and of peace. There shall be no end. That's almost hard to imagine, isn't it? An endless, everlasting, forever peace, with no end under the reign, and the rule of a good Prince of Peace, who came that we might have peace with God, and with one another.

We sing about it at Christmas. We just sang, Hark the Herald Angels Sing. Peace on earth, and mercy mild. God and sinners reconciled. God desires for his people to have peace.

So my question for you this morning is very simple. It's simply this. Do you have it? Do you have it? Let's look to our passage this morning, Philippians chapter 4.

And what we're going to see here is three ways that God desires peace for his people. This is going to be our outline this morning if you're taking notes. I'm going to try to make it easy for you to follow along.

It's three ways that God desires peace for his people. First, number one, God desires for us to have peace with one another. God desires for us to have horizontal one another peace.

[4 : 03] If you look there with me to verse 2, he says this. Paul says, I entreat Euodia, and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. Oh boy. There's an issue here in the church at Philippi.

There's a disagreement. Now, we don't know exactly what the issue is, what the argument is. These two ladies here in the church are arguing. Maybe they're disagreeing on whose name is harder to pronounce.

I don't know. The Euodia and Syntyche are fighting. And I think it's also clear that this is significant to Paul because he calls them out here by name.

I mean, could you imagine? Everybody gathers around in Philippi to hear this letter from the apostle Paul, and your name comes up. You're called out in front of everybody. Paul goes straight to it.

And he says, I entreat you to agree in the Lord. As you zoom out, and remember the context here of where we've been, right? Paul has been helping the Philippians to live out their faith.

[5 : 01] He's been calling them and urging them to walk in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. He's been calling them to humble yourself like Christ. He keeps encouraging them to pursue unity with each other.

But up to this point, it's all been pretty general, hasn't it? It's kind of theoretical. It's ideas. But now, it's like we're going to get a case study in how this ought to play out in the life of the church.

It's not just theoretical anymore. We're applying this truth now. And here's the test, right? Because everybody can just nod their head and agree with some general truth. But when your name gets called out and say, you need to do this, will we actually apply the truth and put it into practice?

And I love passages like this because it helps me. It helps me to remember that none of this is just theoretical. None of this is just kind of imaginary.

This is a real church with real people and with real tensions. Real problems that they have to sift through and work through. This is a real church like ours.

[6 : 09] There's real interpersonal dynamics to work through. There's real tensions here that they have to navigate. And again, we don't know exactly what the issue was.

But another detail I think we can pull out here and see is that this seems to be a conflict between two women who are in some way leaders in the church of Philippi.

Paul says that these women have labored side by side with me in the gospel. But now, these women who've labored side by side with Paul are now coming head to head with each other.

And you can imagine how this would be an issue for Paul. You can imagine how this would be significant enough for him to draw this out in the letter to the Philippians. It would be hard for a church to thrive if leadership is at odds with each other.

You see that issue. It would be hard. I'll let you in on a secret here though. So, sometimes Christians and sometimes even Christian leaders don't always agree on everything.

[7 : 13] The Bible makes this very clear and very plain. This is real life. Sometimes even elders don't agree on every little thing. Sometimes deacons don't agree on every little thing.

Sometimes Bible study leaders don't always agree on every little thing. This is real life in the church. And it's not just the leadership but the membership of the church. Sometimes membership, sometimes the members of a church, sometimes y'all get on each other's nerves.

Be honest. When you get a bunch of sinners together, here's the honest truth, at some point or another we're going to grate on each other's nerves.

This is real life talk in the church. When you gather a group of sinners, even regenerate sinners, even born again sinners, even saved sinners, at some point or another we're going to have some level of conflict.

Now I do want to be clear here because I am thankful that right now in our church we're enjoying a season of sweet unity. And there's been very, very little of this type of drama in my time here at the church.

[8 : 20] Our leadership is very much aligned and I'm grateful, grateful for that. But here's again the honest truth. Every church, at some point or another, every church eventually has some level of conflict.

It's not a matter of if, but when, and to what extent. And that might be an issue of clashing personalities. You think one way, another person thinks another way.

You, you're wired one way and another person is wired differently and those personalities just don't mesh. They, they clash with one another. It might be, might be clashing personalities. It might be an issue of, of differing preferences.

You have preferences. I have preferences. Everybody has their own personal preference and they don't always, all the time, line up with one another. And so we, when we come together, we have to have a little bit of give and take, right?

But also, if we're being honest, it also, it might genuinely be an issue of sin. I'll tell you the truth. When, when people get together, when you spend enough time together, when you're, when you're actually doing life together as a church, at some point or another, it's, it's probable, it's highly likely that at some point, someone will probably sin against you in this church.

[9 : 37] And it's also highly likely if you spend enough time with one another that, that you will probably sin against someone else in this church. So the question becomes, well, what do we do with it?

How do we handle it when it comes? Will we, will we take all that Paul has been showing us this whole time through the book of Philippians and will we actually put it into practice? Will we extend to others what Christ has extended to us?

Will we humble ourselves as Christ has humbled himself? Will we pursue peace with one another as God has pursued peace with us in Christ? This is what, what Paul calls us to also in Ephesians chapter four, kind of a parallel passage.

He says, be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another as God in Christ forgave you. Here's the point.

Christians of all people ought to know what it's like to be forgiven. And so Christians of all people ought to be quick to forgive. Christians of all people know what it's like to be reconciled and so Christians of all people ought to be eager to seek out reconciliation with one another.

[10 : 51] Christians of all people know what it's like to be loved despite your shortcomings, despite your failings, despite your sins, and so Christians of all people ought to be eager to extend the love of Christ to one another. Here's the point. At Christmas, we celebrate the glorious truth that Jesus has come to bring peace on earth. Vertical peace between God and man. God and sinners reconciled.

But here's the thing. That vertical peace ought to spill over into horizontal peace with one another. If you have experienced and received reconciliation with God, peace with God, unity with God vertically through Jesus Christ, you ought to be eager to pursue horizontal peace with one another.

God desires that we have peace with one another. So Paul says, Euodia and Syntyche pursue unity.

Forgive one another. Agree in the Lord. And if you can't do it on your own, look there to verse 3. He says, if you can't resolve that issue on your own, Paul says, well, guess what? That little personal rift that you're having, just the two of you, it is no longer personal. The church ought to come together and help resolve the issue. Look there to verse 3. He says, I ask you, true companion, help these women. Help them. They've labored with me. They're believers. I'm sure of it. Their names are in the book of life. And now they need your help, church, to resolve their dispute. So come along and help them. Christian, are you eager to pursue peace with one another? Are you easily offended?

Are you easily annoyed and bothered by other people's sins? Or are you eager to pursue unity and to pursue this horizontal peace with one another? God desires that we have peace with each other. Not only the second way God desires us to have peace. God desires that we have peace in every circumstance.

[13:10] In every circumstance. Look there to verse 4. Verse 4. There's several commands here that Paul gives. I count three. And as I read at first blush, all three sound impossible. Absolutely impossible. He says, verse 4, he says, rejoice in the Lord always. How's that for a command? That's not a suggestion, church. This is a command from the Lord. Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I say, he wants to make sure we understand this. Again, I say, rejoice. Don't let your circumstances alter your joy. Christians aren't meant to be up one day and down the next. Even in sadness, even in struggle, Christians are to have joy that's not altered or shaken by our circumstances. And that type of joy can't be explained in worldly terms, can it?

How do we explain joy like this? You know, that's often one of the ways that the Lord will catch a non-believer's attention. You realize this? A Christian is going through something that from a worldly perspective ought to just crush them. They're going through suffering, through loss, through cancer, through some sort of devastating circumstance. And yet, even in the midst of this tragedy and hardship, guess what? There's joy. And they ask, where does that joy come from?

Rejoice always, he says. Second command, he says, verse five, let your reasonableness be known to everyone. Now, another way to read that is let your gentleness be known to everyone. Now, most of the commentators that I read this week, they agreed that there's likely some external persecution coming against the church in Philippi. There's enemies from the outside. These believers here in Philippi are facing some sort of persecution and opposition. They're being mocked and ridiculed, even attacked. And so again, the natural response to something like this is what?

I'm going to get back. I'm going to retaliate. I'm going to fight back. I'm going to take up arms and defend myself. I'm not going to let anybody do anything to me. But what does Paul say? He says here, don't be violent. Don't repay evil for evil. Instead, let everyone see your reasonableness.

Let everyone see your gentleness. I mean, how in the world can anyone have the strength to be gentle when they're facing persecution? It seems impossible. Again, second impossible command. But the third command here, in my opinion, this seems the most impossible out of all of them to me. Look there to verse six. It's a two-parter. It's don't do this, but do this instead. Don't do this, but do this instead. He says, do not be anxious about anything. You hear that? Do not be anxious about anything.

[16 : 18] I mean, Paul, are you serious? Don't you know what I have on my plate? How in the world is this even possible? Put yourself in the Philippians' shoes as they would read this. Think about all the things that they have to be anxious about. How are we supposed to not be anxious? Paul, you're in prison right now. Our spiritual father is in prison. We don't know whether he's going to survive or die out of this. He might be sentenced to death. Paul, we're anxious about you. How can you tell us not to be anxious? And not only that, we have this external threat against us, this persecution coming against us.

We have problems outside of our church. Paul, how in the world can we not be anxious when the world around us hates us and wants to destroy us? And not only that, Paul, apparently you know about the issues we have in our church. Euodia and Syntyche, these women that are meant to be leaders in the church and they can't seem to get along. We're worried about this. Paul, how in the world can you tell us don't be anxious about anything? Don't you see the problems we have? I wonder if you've ever felt that way. Because you realize this command is a command for you, Christian. Christian, you are commanded. Do not be anxious about anything. I wonder if you hear that and you just, you think that's impossible. Paul doesn't have a clue what I got on my plate. Maybe you're thinking I have holiday stress. Paul doesn't know about that. Paul never hosted my in-laws for Christmas.

Paul never planned a holiday party. I got to clean the house. I got to cook. I got to buy the presents. I got to make sure everything's planned out. I got to make sure everybody's happy. I'm traveling here. I'm traveling there. Paul never had to deal with any of that. He doesn't know what I'm dealing with. And maybe it's family stress. Y'all don't have any of that, I know. Maybe it's you're anxious about seeing family members you haven't seen in a while. You know there's tensions there.

You don't know what that's going to be like when you walk in the door and you have that interaction and they're going to say that one thing that's going to set you off or you're going to say that one thing that's going to set them off. What's that going to be like? You're anxious about it.

Maybe you're anxious about your children or your grandchildren. I've heard some of your prayers of decisions they've made or conversations that you've had or things that you're just, you're worried about them and their future. Are you anxious? It might be financial stress. I mean, let's be real.

[18 : 50] This time of year, especially, this is hard for many people. You worry about, am I going to be able to provide for my family? Your blood pressure rises every time you go to the mailbox because you worry maybe there's going to be another bill and you're not going to have enough to pay it.

But the truth is, church, there is always something that could make you anxious. So the question again is, how do we handle it? What do we do with it? What's the pathway forward for us to obey these impossible commands that Paul's laying out for us here? And here's what he says.

Look there again to verse five. Paul says, let me give you a little bit of perspective here that you might've forgotten. He says, friend, the Lord is at hand.

The Lord is at hand. That truth ought to transform the way that we view everything else in our life.

The Lord is coming. Have you forgotten? The Lord is coming back. The Lord is coming soon. So whatever it is that grieves you and makes it impossible seemingly to rejoice always, whatever it is that grieves you here and now will be eclipsed by fullness of joy at the return of Christ.

[20 : 16] Whatever it is that threatens to steal away your joy now will be done away with for good at his return. Have you forgotten? The Lord is at hand. There will be no more sin. No more death. No more sorrow.

No more pain. No more tears. No more goodbyes. No more awkward family interactions. The Lord is at hand. So rejoice always. Again, I say rejoice.

As a Christian, the Lord is at hand. So whatever threats are coming against you, whatever opposition faces you, whatever persecution you endure here and now, whatever enemy you might have here and now, remember, the Lord is at hand and with him, he is bringing justice. King Jesus is coming back.

Of the increase of his government and of peace, there will be no end. The king is coming and with him, he is bringing justice, perfect justice. So we no longer have to think that we have to take vengeance into our own hands. We can be reasonable and gentle. So we look ahead to the return of Christ. Friend, the Lord is at hand, Paul says. So every little thing that brings you stress right now, every little decision that you're anxious about, every little thing that makes that blood pressure rise, guess what? When he returns, it will dissolve in an instant. All will be well. The Lord is at hand.

This world with all of its stressors and all of its worries will be gone in the blink of an eye. And you, if you are in Christ, you get to spend eternity forever with God under the reign and rule of the Prince of Peace. That's your future. So tell me again, what's got you anxious?

[22 : 07] Jesus, the Lord is at hand. I love the words of Jesus in Matthew chapter 6. You don't have to turn there. I'll read it. Jesus says, therefore, I tell you, do not be anxious about your life. That's the same command, isn't it? Do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on is not the life, is not life more than food and the body more than clothing. Look at the birds of the air. They neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you, raise your hand, which of you by being anxious can add even a single hour to the span of his life?

Why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow. They neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore, do not be anxious, saying, what shall we eat? What shall we drink? What shall we wear? For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. Here's the command. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Fix your eyes on the kingdom.

Fix your eyes on the king. The Lord is at hand. And in the meantime, as you wait on his return, Paul says, there's something that you can do to add to your peace here and now. Do you know what it is?

Look there again. The Lord is at hand. Do not be anxious about anything, but do this. In everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your request be made known to God. And here's the promise. The peace of God, which transcends all understanding, surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Listen to me. Listen to me here. I want you to get this, okay? Listen to me. Our prayer life is directly correlated with our experience of the peace of God. There is a God-appointed link between prayer and peace. If you are not experiencing peace this Christmas, I wonder, are you experiencing prayer? He bids you come. He's eager to hear. He's eager to give you peace. Here's the good news. If you want peace this Christmas, you can have it. Go get on your knees and pray. There's an old hymn. What a friend we have in Jesus. All our sins and griefs to bear.

What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer. Oh, what peace we often forfeit. Oh, what needless pain we bear. All because we do not carry everything to God in prayer. Do you want peace, church?

[25 : 35] Commit yourself to prayer. Pray until you have the peace that God has promised you. Lay hold of this promise of God, that the peace of God that doesn't make any sort of sense to anybody around you, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Third, finally, God desires that we would have peace in his presence. God desires that we have peace in his presence. Look there with me again to verse 8. Paul, he brings this whole section to a close with this set of instructions here in verse 8.

He says, finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there's any excellence, if there's anything worthy of praise, think about these things. And what you have learned and received and heard in me and seen in me, practice these things. And here's the promise. The God of peace will be with you. You hear the promise?

The God of peace will be with you. He says, the Lord is at hand. The time is coming soon. We're going to know perfect peace that's ahead of us because we'll finally be with the God of peace with no more sin, no distraction, no weakness, nothing to disturb our peace and joy and our worship. But now, Paul says, even now, Paul says, you can experience the presence and the peace of God with you right now. Do you believe that? How do we do it? Look there again, because it seems to be conditional here, doesn't it? But Paul says, think like this and practice this and what's the result? The God of peace will be with you. Now, again, we got to remember who he's talking to here. He's talking to Christians, okay? This is a church that he's talking to. These are people who have already received that vertical peace between God and man through faith in Jesus Christ. They've already been reconciled to God. And so, if you have not yet received that peace, you can't move on to step two here. Okay, step number one for you. If you don't know the Lord, if you have not received peace with God through putting your faith in Christ, don't pass on beyond that and just ask, what do I need to do to get peace? What you need to do is repent and put your faith in Christ. That's step number one. But then, now here, Paul says, after receiving that new life, after receiving forgiveness of sins, after being reconciled to God and united to Christ, Paul says, here in the flesh, as we wait for his return, there are things we can do, steps that we can take to more fully experience the presence of God with us. In other words, here's what I think he's saying. There is a certain way that we ought to think in a certain way that we ought to live in order to maximize our experience of the presence of God with us. And in doing so, to maximize our experience of the peace of God within us. So, let's look here. He says, two instructions. He says, think like this and live like this. You see that there?

Think like this and live like this. Think like this, whatever's true, whatever's honorable, whatever's just, whatever's pure, whatever's lovely, whatever's commendable. If there's any excellence, if there's anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

Think about these things. That's the command here. You do realize what you put into your mind affects your peace. What you put into your mind affects your experience of the peace of God. It's like junk food. If you put junk food into your body, does that affect your body? Yes, it does.

[29 : 41] If you put junk into your mind, it affects your mind. Paul says, think on these things. And of course, if you want total purity and total excellence, there's no match for the word of God, is there?

Psalms 19 says, the law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart. The commandment of the Lord is clean, enduring forever. The rules of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. There is nowhere you can look on planet earth that can match the purity and the excellence of the word of God.

So if you want to think about what's true and what's right and what's pure and what's praiseworthy, number one place you need to go this year, where is it?

Commit yourself to intake this word. Commit yourself right now to say, I'm going to fight for joy in the Lord every day, even when I don't feel like it.

I'm going to come to this word and say, Lord, would you, would you sanctify my mind in the truth? The word of God is completely pure. But I think, I think Paul is also telling us, don't, don't stop there. You see that here? Six times, you see it? Six times he says the word, whatever. You see that? Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just on down the list.

[31 : 17] I think what he's telling us is, is seek out the good and the true. Seek out God and his goodness wherever you can. The yes, total purity is only found in the word of God, but, but we acknowledge that there is, is common grace everywhere you look. But there is, is common grace. There are reasons to praise the Lord everywhere you look, if you look. And what Paul's doing here is he's, he's giving us categories of evaluation. Now, as you walk through life, as you, as you, as you watch a movie, as you read a book, as you, as you have a conversation with your neighbor, Paul's giving us categories of evaluation here and saying, you go mine for gold. You take that pan and you, you sift out all the mud and all the dirt and all the, all the gravel and you keep that nugget of truth wherever you can find it.

Let everything else wash away. He says, peace will come upon you as you think on these things and see that glimmer of the goodness of God everywhere, everywhere you can. But not only this, he says, practice these things. In other words, don't just nod your head in agreement at the truth.

Don't just leave it as theoretical. Verse nine, what you have learned and received and heard and seen in me. Practice these things. Practice these things. Put into action the truth that you hear when you leave this place. Don't just leave here nodding your head at the truth. Practice these things. I would love for each of you to just take one or two things. Just, just write down one or two things that you'd like to put into practice this week and this month. Don't just leave here nodding your head. Practice these things. And here's the promise. The God of peace will be with you. You realize that's the whole story of the Bible. That's the whole story of the Bible. And that one promise, the story of the Bible is a story of God making a way to be with his people. That's the story that we celebrate here at Christmas.

The word of God, the son of God, the creator of all things, stepped down into his own creation in order to redeem it. The prince of peace came into a world of chaos. The perfect son of God came to pay the price so that sinners like you and me can know the peace of God and can know peace with God and walk in the peace of God. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son and they shall call his name what? Emmanuel, which means God with us. The whole story of scripture from beginning to end is, is a story of God making a way to dwell with his people from the garden to the cloud, to the tabernacle, to the temple, to the stable, to the Holy Spirit, to the new creation. Where John says in Revelation 21, behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them. They will be his people.

And God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes and death shall be no more. Neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore for the former things have passed away. It's the story of God bringing peace on earth, goodwill toward man.

[35 : 06] So I ask you again as we close this morning, do you have it? Do you have peace with God? Are you walking in the peace that God's brought you in Christ? Are you casting your anxieties on him and letting the peace of God rule in your hearts and your minds? Are you experiencing total peace with the Lord? The good news is, friend, if you want peace this morning, you can have it.

Come to Christ. Cast all your anxieties on him. Rest in him. Put your hope in him. Think upon him. Trust in him. Walk with him. Abide in him. And here's the promise for you. The peace of God and the God of peace will be with you. Let's pray. Father, we thank you for this good promise of peace.

I know what it's like to not have it. And so I pray for those in this room that we would have the peace that comes by faith in a perfect Savior, Jesus Christ, who came that we might have peace with God, be reconciled to you. And I pray for these Christians, Lord, in front of me that maybe are walking in anxiety and stress. Father, we give that to you. And we ask God, would you give us peace?

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.