

Having the mind of Christ in his joyful gentleness

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[0 : 00] One of those mornings, I wondered where my glasses had gone, so I went to look for them, went right back to the car, came back, and they were on my seat. It's like that, isn't it? I was talking to the seniors the other day about getting older and forgetting things. That's me.

Anyway, back to the sermon. Philippians chapter 4, and it says verses 2 to 5 on the screen. We're looking at a series on the mind of Christ, and today's sermon is entitled, Having the Mind of Christ in His Joyful Gentleness.

And our text is verses 2 to 5, so if you can next slide, please. But I'm just going to read verse 1, just to show the link between what he's previously said about pressing on toward the goal, and what he now says in a series of exhortations that will take us through to the end of the chapter, although not all today.

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. So standing firm in the Lord, from Paul's point of view, is ensuring that you press toward the goal.

It's kind of interesting, isn't it, that you think of standing as a static position, but the way to stand firm in the Christian life is to go forward. It's never to be standing still, but to be pressing on.

[1 : 39] I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche. Probably not their real names. I've mentioned this before. Perhaps Paul has been kind.

It may be, of course, their real names, but it's unusual. Euodia has a bit of a smell about it, and Syntyche suggests temperamental. So perhaps not their real names, but you'll see the reason in a moment.

I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord. So they've fallen out over something. And they're well known, nonetheless, to the Philippian church.

And notice they have been good servants of Jesus Christ. Yes, and I ask you, loyal York fellow, help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel.

So it's not just the immature believer that can fall out. Anyone can. When we forget the focus on the Lord and we put the interests of the flesh first, it's possible for us to, unfortunately, do those things which would otherwise we wouldn't do.

[2 : 54] Along with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers whose names are in the book of life. Now notice, they have fallen out, but they're in the book of life. Yeah?

It doesn't de-Christianize them. We Christians, I often like to ask this question of new or newish believers when they complain about the fact that they still struggle in their sin.

And I like to ask them the question, what kind of sins do you think Christians are capable of carrying out? And I usually always drop in murder as an example.

And they'll say, oh, no, not possible. Well, Moses murdered somebody after he saw a vision of God. Yeah. David murdered somebody and he had a heart after God's own heart.

So, if the flesh gets control, we're capable of doing all kinds of things that otherwise we'd never dream we could do. We must never underestimate the power of the flesh.

[3 : 58] Especially because the devil uses that as a way of getting a foothold. Now, not many Christians will go out and murder or commit adultery or that kind of thing.

But that would cause an enormous scandal. And they would never dream of doing that. But having a point of principle that leads to an argument that causes a division in the church is quite easy for Christians to do.

Just look around at how many denominations there are. Most of them are unjustified. They're not justified doctrinally. They're because people wanted their way at the expense of somebody else.

And so these things can easily happen. Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again, rejoice. Let your gentleness be evident to all.

The Lord is near. It's very difficult to know where to cut off here. I cut it here just because I thought a sermon on anxiety would be a really good sermon, especially in the modern world in which we're in, where anxiety is at epidemic proportion.

[5 : 12] So I leave that for somebody else because I'm kind like that. So what can we say about this? Next slide, please. Actions speak louder than words.

An apple a day keeps the doctor away. All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others. Anybody know where that comes from?

Animal farm. Well done. And the author? George Orwell. Yeah, well done. And the final quiz, do or not do, there is no try.

That's Yoda. All right. Okay, if you were feeling really good because you know your literature, well, there's one you didn't know.

Neither did I until I looked it up. These are what we refer to as aphorisms. Not adages, because adages are kind of passed down traditionally over many years.

[6 : 15] Aphorisms, we know the author. And the point of an aphorism is that it's a concise statement of principle. They were first introduced to the Western world by Hippocrates.

Remember him of the medical profession's fame. So an apple a day keeps the doctor away, has scientific backing to it. There are nutrients and minerals in an apple which are very good for you.

Eat one every day, your health will be better than if you didn't. And so these are general truths.

Actions speak louder than words. That's true, isn't it?

Because we kind of like hear somebody say, I really like you, and then discover they're gossiping about us. Or, oh, I really care about you, but when you're in need, they don't do anything to help you.

They'll believe your actions rather than your words. Rejoice in the Lord always is an aphorism. It's a general principle or statement that if you live by it, your life will go better for you than if you didn't do it.

[7 : 24] If you want to live a happy, contented life in this world, Paul says, rejoice in the Lord. If you want to overcome difficulties in your life, Paul says, rejoice in the Lord.

In fact, he believes it so much that he repeats it. I say it again, rejoice. He's already said it to us in chapter 3 when he says, finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord.

It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again. And notice, it is a safeguard for you. It is a safeguarding issue in your life. You know, when you're tempted to feel really miserable and discontent, where does that leave you?

Remember last time when I spoke on chapter 3 in verse 1, I left you with a homework, which was, try and find something to be thankful for each day and begin each day by thanking God for the day. And your life will feel much better. And some of you tried it. Well done, and let me know. That was great. Maybe more than told me. But that's fine. If you want to live a contented life on earth, rejoice in the Lord always, he says.

[8 : 37] And this is our sermon focus. Next slide, please. This is our sermon focus. We're wanting to discover how to have the mind of Jesus, His mind permeating our mind, in order that we might live a life worthy of Him.

To have the mind of Christ is to have His influence in our lives. What we think is usually a reflection of who we are.

And that obviously matters when it comes to the question of anxiety in prayer. You can face life's troubles and be anxious about them, or you can bring your anxiety to the Lord in prayer and hand over your troubles to Him.

One way or the other. But there's a world of difference between those two things. I must not transgress into next week's sermon. So this is interesting, isn't it?

This focus that we have. Because it's essentially what the writers of the New Testament want us to do. when you're facing persecution and difficulties, according to the writer to the Hebrews, when you're in danger of having your property taken from you, or you're in danger of going to prison, or you're in danger of losing your life, He says, look unto Jesus.

[10 : 07] That's the way out of this. Look unto Jesus. He doesn't say, just pray, and then all your troubles will go away. They'll melt. Like the, you know, melting snow.

It's not like that. He never promises that the troubles will go away. He says that the way through this trial is to look unto Jesus. And to remember that He endured the cross.

That He scorned its shame and then sat down at the right hand of God. In other words, embrace the suffering as part of God's will, part of God's purpose, the way through it is not to lament and mourn and say, woe is me.

The way through it is to look to Jesus. And Jesus said to us, didn't He, come to Me, all you who lay barren and are heavy laden, and I will give you, what?

Rest. And how can Jesus give us rest? He says, because I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your soul.

[11:11] I am gentle. I understand that this is really hard for you. And I want you to know that if you lay it on my shoulders, I'll carry it for you. You get yoked together with me because my way, my yoke is easy.

In other words, if we try to carry it alone, it'll just get too heavy for us. And we'll get more and more worn down by the trials and difficulties of life. But if we hand it over to Jesus, He says, guess what you'll discover?

You'll discover that your Lord gets lighter because I can carry it for you and you'll discover when you give it to me, my Lord, it's easy.

That's the way you should have gone. I mean, how many times have we been difficult and said, I really, really struggled with this and then I just handed it over to the Lord and I felt so much better because His way is so much easier than our own.

Yeah. Sometimes, even if the problem doesn't go away, you change. You get the proper perspective and you discover that the problem wasn't as big as you thought it was.

[12:28] The other day, I was taking Eve to school at about half past eight in the morning, passing the school children waiting to go into Caden College and I noticed a girl holding up a tree.

Well, actually, she wasn't. The tree was holding her up. She was just leaning against the tree with her phone in her hand, communicating with her friends. But it would be quite possible to look at that scene and think, there's a girl holding up a tree.

Except trying to hold up a tree is a very difficult thing to do. It's much better if the tree holds you up. You get my point? It's all about perspective.

Are we holding the Lord up? No. Is He holding us up? Yes, every day. My yoke is easy. My burden is light. So then, next slide, please.

What can we learn from this passage when we need to address issues of difficulty in our lives?

Now, the particular issue here, as I've already observed, was a falling out between two women in the church.

[13:41] And throughout the history of the church, lots of people have fallen out. And throughout the history of this church, people have fallen out. It happens. It happens in every church because people are people. and because sometimes we don't quite do the things we ought to do.

It's almost certain that this was not over a doctrinal issue. It's almost certain that this was not a moral issue. And I say that because, well, two reasons.

First of all, if there was a doctrinal issue over which people fell out, Paul would address it. If you read the letter to Corinth, for example, when they were falling out over the fact that they were doing immoral things, Paul kind of was explicit in telling you what those immoral things were.

If it was a sin, if it was a moral sin, he would tell you. If there was a doctrinal issue like in Galatians with Peter, he kind of called it out. He said, you know, this thing on justification is really important that we sought this.

Is it by works or by faith? He called it out. He wanted people to know. But here, this is different. This is probably just a personal issue. A difference of perspective.

[14:57] Difference of ideas. These are two loyal servants of the gospel. Strong-minded perhaps. Proven in their service. Paul says that.

But it's caused a problem, enough of a problem, for word to get back to Paul, and remember, there are no emails, and even if they sent a pigeon, and in those days with the big scrolls, it would have to be a big pigeon, it would still take a long time to get the message to Paul.

So this has been festering for quite a while, and it has the potential to divide the church. And there's the Clement back at home saying, I hope Epaphroditus gets that letter to him, and I hope Paul comes back with some advice.

And the advice comes back. I want you to agree with one another in the Lord. I want you to agree with one another in the Lord. We'll kind of think about what that means in a moment.

So, this is not a big issue in terms of threatening the doctrinal purity or moral purity of the church.

This is something that is in danger of escalating over personal differences.

[16:16] personalities that otherwise are godly, who love the Lord, whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life, but who have a principle disagreement with each other.

Next slide, please. But it has to be addressed because, as Mary Ann Getty says, a continuing antagonism can only weaken the church and scandalize those who look for role models among their leadership.

and these ladies would be principal leaders in the church. It can scandalize though these Christians are meant to love each other, not to side with one another.

And so, it must be addressed. Next slide, please. So, there is a need to reconcile, agree with one another in the Lord. Literally, have the same mind in the Lord.

Now, the same mind would not necessarily mean that they have to agree. They could agree to disagree. What they're agreeing to in the Lord is not to fall out over it and not to demand that they get their way.

[17:28] There's nothing wrong with principal disagreements. We can have them. I doubt, if we were to sit together in a room and discuss all of our political and social, moral, and even theological ideas, we'd have lots of differences of opinion and they may be quite valid.

You know, and yet, we all have a tendency to think we're right, don't we? We're right in our rightness. Yeah? Even if we're wrong, we think we're right.

Now, I don't mean even if we're wrong to say you are wrong. I just say, well, actually, if there's two or three or four opinions on a matter, it's likely that two or three of you are wrong. that's just the nature of how it is.

I don't know how many times over the years I thought I was right only to discover I was wrong. You know, John Winter, who's 61, could speak to John Winter, who's 30, and be embarrassed about what John Winter would have, you know, died on a hill for at 30 that I wouldn't die now for.

So, you know, it's just the way things are. There will be differences. That's not the issue. The issue is how you handle differences. How you manage not getting your own way.

[18:47] We have an expression, don't we, let's not spit our dummy out. It's very difficult not to spit your dummy out, especially when you feel strongly about something and feel that everybody else ought to feel as strongly as you about it.

This morning, I came in, and Mary, as she does, nudges me and says, you'll be happy. Yeah? You know why? Mary supports Middlesbrough. Poor lass. They lost yesterday.

I support Newcastle. They've won yesterday. So, I'm feeling chipper. I think I made the right decision, Mary. We won't fall out over it.

She'll say it again next week. When they've won and we've lost. That's the way it goes. Actually, next Sunday, Mary, we don't play until Monday. So, there's now to say. And most of the time, that's how we handle our differences.

So, a bit of a laugh, a bit of a joke, it's not a big deal. But it's when it is a big deal that it causes problems. And if it causes problems, Paul says, you need help to reconcile it.

[19:56] Agree with one another in the Lord. What does that mean? It could mean, agree with one another because of the Lord. Don't dishonor his reputation by falling out and causing division.

That will only dishonor his reputation. It could be, agree with one another in the Lord in that you need to sit down and sort it out and then agree which way the Lord would approve of.

Less likely, that I think. But whatever it means, it's remembering that Jesus is the one you focus on in life, but whenever there are difficulties too.

And whenever, certainly whenever you begin to feel so angry with a brother or sister in Christ that you find it's damaged the relationship. Didn't Jesus call us to be one?

To love one another as he has loved us. So if it damages the relationship, then you must agree with one another in the Lord. You must allow the love of Jesus to permeate your heart and soul so that you can put aside these differences.

[21:09] Next slide, please. So Paul calls upon these two loyal, tried, and tested servants of Christ to have a common mind in Christ.

That is to show forgiveness, reconciliation, and love for the honor of Jesus and for the good of the church. It's surrendering your own need to be right, your own need to be vindicated, your own need to feel better about the situation, your own sense of self-justification.

Surrender that to Jesus. Allow yourself to lose the argument for Jesus. And when you look at the cross, when you look at his attitude to the people who hated him and despitely used him, et cetera, et cetera, it's very difficult to hold on to your dignity and insist on winning in such circumstances.

and that's back to Philippians 2, isn't it? Where Paul says, when you have the mind of Christ in humility, you count others better than yourself.

You take the form of a servant and you scorn its shame. You humble yourself and become nothing. winning. You don't have to insist on winning.

[22 : 45] Alright, there will always be interpersonal conflicts in the church. We get that. That will always happen. But Paul says, when that happens, we must not marginalize another.

We must not deliberately hurt another. We must not insist on getting our way with another. We must not bring others into the argument and insist that we take sides.

We must lay it aside for Jesus. Humble yourself. There's nothing doctrinal at stake. There's no moral sort of compromise going on.

This is just about a difference of opinion. James chapter 4. Do you remember what James chapter 4 says in verses 1 to 10? Let me read it to you.

James says here, what causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it.

[23 : 47] You kill and covet but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. And when you ask, you do not receive because you ask with wrong motives that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes the enemy of God? Or do you think Scripture says without reason that the Spirit He caused to live in us tends toward envy?

But He gives us more grace. This is why the Scripture said, God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. Submit yourself then to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands you sinners and purify your hearts you double-minded. Grieve, mourn, and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom.

Humble yourself before the Lord and He will lift you up. Wow, that's tough talk. Never underestimate the power of the devil to take advantage of the church when two Christians disagree with one another over matters of relatively unimportant things.

[25 : 12] It can even be as simple as what color carpet should we get. Yeah. It so easy happens. Because the devil wants to exploit it not because he cares about the color of carpets but because he cares about the power of a church that is in unity.

He understands that there's nothing more threatening to him than when Christians are getting on with one another and getting on with the work in the Lord. Okay, next slide please.

Unity is always the goal. Sorry about that. You can't see that. Just ignore the slide. Unity is the goal to ensure that we live the life that Jesus wants us to live.

To live out the new commandment just as he intended. And love is the goal. What does love look like? See, I think Christians use the word love perhaps more than any other word.

We talk about loving one another. We talk about the love of Jesus. The love of God, etc. But what is it? It's not a feeling really, is it? I mean, it will have a feeling as a consequence, but it isn't a feeling.

[26 : 25] It's not like romantic love, you know, when you kind of feel that, remember if you've forgotten. Love is an emotion. But actually, in the New Testament, love is an action.

It's a verb. 1 Corinthians chapter 13 verses 4 to 7 defines love. It tells us that love is patient. It is kind. It does not envy. It does not boast.

It is not arrogant. It is not rude. It does not insist on getting its own way. It is not irritable. It is not resentful. It does not rejoice in the wrongdoing of others, but rejoices in the truth.

It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things. That kind of love never fails. And so, when Paul says, agree with one another in the Lord, express your love to one another in the Lord, he's expecting you to climb down if you're angry.

To rebuke yourself if you're annoyed at others because it's not their fault that you're annoyed. You might be annoyed, and you might be annoyed because they're irritating, but you didn't have to get annoyed.

[27 : 38] Yeah? Annoyance doesn't excuse somebody else's bad behavior. Not if it leads you to feel really angry and frustrated at another.

Love works itself out in practice. Paul says, help these dear women to sort this. It isn't acceptable for them to continue all of these months in bitter rancor against one another.

He will not allow sleeping dogs to lie. You know, don't talk about it because it upsets them. No, no, no, he says. That's not the answer. That is a false kind of love.

Sort it out. Agree with one another in the Lord. Next slide, please. And then he calls Christians to be a peacemaker.

Clement and the loyal York fellow, you've got to help them because it's hard. It's hard. You've got to help them. You've got to sit with them. You've got to listen to them. You've got to pray with them.

And you've got to encourage them to sort it out.

[28 : 43] Be a peacemaker. Jesus says, blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God. Here's a little piece of homework. The next time you feel so angry with somebody that you want to kind of say, I'm going to get my own back.

I'm going to let people know what I think about them. Just quote this verse at yourself and ask yourself the question, am I in this moment being a peacemaker? Or am I pouring oil on troubled water?

So many churches that have divided over issues would not have divided over issues if they had set out, determined, to be peacemakers, to reconcile. So many churches have divided because a section have said, we must get our way no matter what it means to the other side.

We insist on our way being the way because we are right. Unacceptable. That's not the solution.

Must be called out as such. Paul doesn't say, make sure Euodia wins and Syntyche loses. Or the reverse, he says, help them to reconcile.

[29 : 59] So be peacemakers. Don't be a gossip, be a peacemaker. If you're going to stand firm in the Lord, you're going to live in a way worthy of the gospel, then you have to help Christians live together in unity.

Now let me show you this slide. Next slide, please. This is John Wesley. John Wesley was a wonderful preacher of the gospel. Lived until he was over 90 years of age.

Went around on horseback, came to Whitby nine times. churches were built here because of the overflow of people who were converted in Wesley's time. Wesley was converted, or at least was partly fired up to preach the gospel when he was at Oxford.

He belonged to something called the Holy Club at Oxford. Some very keen ministers, and one of his friends there was George Whitfield. Whitfield was also a great preacher.

Preached to Kingswood Miners, to over 10,000 people without amplification, and thousands were converted. It was a fantastic orator. Whitfield was a Calvinist, and Wesley was an Arminian.

[31 : 11] Now don't worry too much about what those terms mean, but they led to theological disagreements. And people took sides. People said, I follow Wesley, others followed Whitfield.

Whitfield went mainly to preach in America after that, and wasn't around very much in the UK.

Wesley was. But people would write and ask them, what do you think of the other? Whitfield died, so the story goes, although I've read the story the other way around, so it might be apocryphal.

Whitfield dies, and when he dies, Wesley is asked by Whitfield, before he dies of course, he's asked by Whitfield to preach at his funeral.

It is said that when Wesley preached, after he preached, there was a lady there who had been converted under Whitfield's ministry, who came to Mr.

Wesley, dear Mr. Wesley, she called him, and asked him whether Mr. Whitfield would be in heaven. Mr. Wesley replied, no.

[32 : 20] And she said, oh, I was afraid you were going to say that, and looked very glum. to which he said, don't misunderstand me, George Whitfield was so bright a star in the firmament of God's glory, and will stand so near the throne, that no one like me, who am less than the least, will ever catch a glimpse of him.

What a godly heart. He didn't allow the fact that there were tribes arguing theologically about who is right and who is wrong, who wanted to dechristianize the other side.

He didn't allow that to infiltrate his own heart. He said, he's my dear brother in Christ. We agree with one another in the Lord.

When Whitfield wrote to Wesley just before he died, he wrote first to John Wesley's brother Charles, he called Charles, my very dear old friend, and he referred to John as your honored brother, in token of my indissoluble union with them in heart and Christian affection, notwithstanding our difference in judgment about some particular points of doctrine.

That's how to agree with one another in the Lord. You don't dechristianize another just because you don't agree with them. It's not your call. There are ways in which we can find unity.

[33 : 53] Okay, next slide please. So the answer to all this is to rejoice in the Lord. Oh, brother, we disagree on this matter or that matter or the other matter.

Actually, we're one in Christ, so we rejoice together in our Lord Jesus Christ, and that's what really matters. Chapter 1 and verse 4, Paul says, in all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.

When I look at you, I think, we're brothers and sisters in Christ. We rejoice together in the Lord. Philippians 2 verse 17 says, even if I am poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all.

When you hear I'm suffering, Paul said, I'm glad. Let's rejoice together. Chapter 3 and verse 1, finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. It is no trouble for me to say this again to you.

It is a safeguard for you. When life's tough, when you're persecuted, when you're in difficulty, let's rejoice in the Lord. And when you fall out in the church, let's rejoice in the Lord.

[35 : 06] It's always the antidote to trouble. We can feel sorry for ourselves, we can feel miserable, or we can rejoice. And so, next slide please.

Paul ends by saying, this section by saying, and let your gentleness be known to all, for the Lord is near. The Lord is near.

Now, this can mean one of two things. It can mean the Lord is coming again very soon. So, imagine what it would be like if you walked in on your church and you're all arguing with each other.

Imagine how you'd feel about that. Or it could mean the Lord is near every conversation you have. The Lord is in your homes.

He's in your assemblies. Because where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them. And imagine how you would feel if you had to explain to Jesus why you were gossiping about a brother or a sister in Christ.

[36 : 12] that's my child you're talking about there. Think again. Think again. So the moral pull of living life every day and knowing that Jesus is listening in our conversations.

And there can be no justification in claiming that we love Jesus but we hate a brother or a sister. John says the love of God cannot be in your heart if that is true.

And so the last slide. A.W. Toza and the pursuit of God. I love Toza. Sorry it's a bit small that isn't it? But I read what he says.

He says to be specific. The self-sins are these self-righteousness self-pity self-confidence self-sufficiency self-admiration self-love and a host of others like them.

They dwell too deeply within us and are too much a part of our natures to come to our attention till the light of God is focused upon them.

[37 : 20] The grosser manifestations of these sins egotism exhibitionism self-promotion are strangely tolerated in Christian leaders even in circles of impeccable orthodoxy.

Promoting self under the guise of promoting Christ is currently so common as to excite little notice. Self can live unrebuked at the very altar.

It can watch the bleeding victim die and not be in the least affected by what it sees. It can fight for the faith of the reformers and preach eloquently the creed of salvation by grace and gain strength by its efforts to tell all the truth.

It seems actually to feed upon orthodoxy and is more at home in a Bible conference than in a tavern. Our very state of longing after God may afford it an excellent condition under which to thrive and grow.

Tozer is warning us about the danger of being more interested in getting self noticed than Jesus noticed. The problem Euodia and Syntyche had was that they were more interested in having their self noticed get in their own way rather than the honor of Jesus.

[38 : 42] And it could have been catastrophic for the church. So let us have the mind of Christ in joyful gentleness whenever we're tempted to feel sorry for ourselves, to feel that we need vindicated, to feel that we need to have our opinions heard or our ways done. ask ourselves, is this the mind of Jesus?