



Steadfast Bible Fellowship

2440 SOUTH 141ST CIRCLE
OMAHA, NE 68144

“The Call to Peace and Contentment,” Philippians 4:2-23

The biblical term for “peace” is rich in its meaning and in its application. The Greek word for peace is *irene*, while the Hebrew is *shalom*. Both terms share a similar meaning: Peace expresses a new relationship with God which replaces the former hostility and enmity. It also pictures our access to Him (see Romans 5). We were once His enemies but have now been reconciled to Him. Things are now right with God; we are at peace with Him and we now can experience the peace of God—one of the fruit of His Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). The Spirit’s peace is that tranquility, that stability, that solidness that allows us to live not a circumstance-controlled life, but a Spirit-controlled life. Such peace is the theme of Philippians 4.

The Call for Peace in the Church, 4:2-3

Two women in the Philippian church, Euodia and Syntyche, were in disagreement with one another and were apparently causing dissension within the church. They had both “labored side by side with me in the gospel,” Paul declared. He therefore called upon a “true companion” (*syzyge*) to effect reconciliation, to help these two women “be of the same mind.” Paul saw all those involved as saints whose “names are in the book of life,” which only appears here and in Revelation 3:5, 13:8, 17:8, 20:12,15, and 21:27. This book apparently lists all of those who have received the gift of eternal life.

The Call for Inner Peace, 4:4-7

vv. 4-6: Paul detailed three prerequisites if we want to experience the peace of God.

1. The first prerequisite is joy (v. 4). Hence he commanded, “rejoice in the Lord” and repeated the command for emphasis. Joy is one of the fruit of the Spirit. It is an attitude of gratitude which flows from our abiding trust in the Lord. We do not rejoice in the circumstances of life, but “In the Lord.”
2. The second prerequisite is *epieikes*, a very difficult word to translate: “gentleness, a forbearing, non-retaliatory spirit, reasonableness, graciousness” are all worthwhile translations. It is an interpersonal relationship term that captures how the believer should respond to people. Perhaps Paul’s counsel was to get along with people. Be a peacemaker (Matthew 5:9), not one who causes tension in relationships but one who reduces tension. Paul offered a strong motivation for this quality of life: “The Lord is at hand [near],” which probably refers to the imminency of His return.
3. The third prerequisite is to not worry but pray. Often our default response to the difficulties of life is anxiety, worry and fear, all of which evidence an absence of trust. But Paul offered a powerful antidote—prayer. He used four words to describe this “dialogue between two people who love one another.”
 - “prayer”—a general term of communion with God
 - “supplication”—requesting an answer to a specific need

- “thanksgiving”—the attitude that should always accompany our conversation with God
- “requests”—emphasize specific, definite items.

v. 7: The result of these three prerequisites will be the “peace of God, which surpasses all understanding.” Such peace defies the ability of the human being to comprehend. It is that inner tranquility that characterizes our walk with God. Amazingly, Paul also added that such peace “guards” (a military term of soldiers who stand in constant vigilance protecting, securing the peace) our minds and our hearts. God’s peace will result in emotional and mental stability.

The Call to Peace of Mind, 4:8-9

v. 8: Paul understood a powerful truth: What we let into our minds affects how we live. Therefore, he exhorted the Philippians to “think” about specific things:

- “true” opposite of dishonest, unreliable, lies
- “honorable” dignified, worthy of respect, nobler
- “just” right, what is in conformity with God’s standard
- “pure” wholesome, not mixed with moral impurity
- “lovely” ethical beauty
- “commendable” admirable, positive, constructive
- “excellence” (*arête*), that which is virtuous
- “worthy of praise”

[Stewardship of the Mind: Mark 12:30-31 declares that we are to love God with our heart, soul, mind and strength. The challenge for the believer is what theologians call the noetic effect of sin: 2 Corinthians 4:4 affirms the depths of sin’s effect on our minds. For that reason, one of the weighty commands of the New Testament is to “renew our minds” (e.g., Romans 12:1-2; Ephesians 4:23). Colossians 3:2 commands: “Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.” In 2 Corinthians 10:5 Paul speaks of taking “every thought captive to obey Christ.”

As 1 Corinthians 2:6-16 explains, God’s Word is the key to mind renewal. The Holy Spirit, who searches the deep things of God, indwells us and enables us to renew our minds and hearts through God’s Word. As this process ensues in the believer’s life, Paul declares, we have “the mind of Christ” (1 Corinthians 2:16). We begin to see and understand things as Christ does. For that reason, believers must exercise the stewardship responsibility of regulating what we let into our minds (see Philippians 4:8). Mind renewal is a stewardship responsibility of the believer and is a critical element in the process of sanctification.]

v. 9: Paul almost audaciously offered himself as a model that Philippians should follow: “What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things.” There was a progression to Paul’s exhortation: Think on these things (v. 8); practice these things (v. 9).

The Call to Contentment, 4:10-20

vv. 10-13: Paul rejoiced that the Philippians had not forgotten him, for through them God had met his needs. Whatever his circumstances, Paul had learned the “secret” of divinely bestowed sufficiency—contentment. He therefore could boldly declare: “I can do all things through him who strengthens me.”

Paul was centered on Christ, the key to his contentment: “grateful for who I am in Christ; grateful for all I have; satisfied with what I make; generous in what I give.”

vv. 14-20: Paul nonetheless thanked the church for their sacrificial giving to support him. Their gifts were a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. Thus God would honor their gifts and bless them abundantly.

Questions:

1. Are you a “peacemaker” in the church? Peace in the church flows from unity. Are you committed to promoting peace within the church?
2. Paul itemizes three prerequisites if we want that quality of life called the peace of God. Are you committed to an attitude of joy, getting along with people, and neutralizing understood anxiety about life with prayer?
3. Our thought life is critical to our walk with God. Examine carefully the virtues listed in v. 8. Are you committed to disciplining yourself as to what you allow into your mind?
4. Dr. Eckman wrote that the key to his contentment is “grateful for who I am in Christ; grateful for all I have; satisfied with what I make; generous in what I give.” Does that describe your attitude and conviction?
5. How important is 3:14 in your life? It is a statement of enduring trust in Christ. Commit yourself to living this truth.
6. Would you use the term “contentment” to describe your demeanor as you approach the daily stresses of life? How is 3:14 related to contentment?

James P. Eckman, Ph.D.
Church Advisor and Teaching Pastor,
Steadfast Bible Fellowship Church Omaha
jeckman5763@gmail.com or
jeckman@steadfastomaha.org
www.issuesinperspective.com