

The People's Choice Series
Philippians 4:4-9
Keeping the Peace

How can we promote a spirit of peace and tranquility in the church? There were two men in a church who were greatly admired. They were both successful businessmen who desired to see people come to Christ. One owned several steakhouse restaurants in the area, but in the early years he had some partners who turned out to be crooked and he had to go to court to prevent them from stealing the businesses from him. The other man sold a successful business in the Midwest to move to Arizona and lead a nationwide Campus Crusade campaign. He had literally sold everything and moved across the country to serve Christ for free. The two men worked together in the Campus Crusade campaign and after it was over Harvey hired Tom to oversee construction. In the process, something happened that drove the construction project costs much higher than expected. Harvey was disturbed at how much it was costing and began to make some questioning comments about the way Tom was handling things. Tom started making comments about Harvey poking his nose into something he knew nothing about. Since the men both attended the same church, people in the church began to pick up on the tension between them. Pretty soon congregation members started to take sides with one or the other. And the tension mounted.

There are many situations in which godly, committed Christians can “be on the outs” with each other. Two leaders teaching Sunday school classes might differ on whether a Christian should abstain from alcohol or can drink moderately. Tension might occur if one of them had an alcoholic father or mother. Or maybe a lady has been in charge of planning the church picnic every year and one year she gets sick and is unable to plan it. Another lady graciously steps in and people like the way she planned it better than the previous lady. And so the next year they bypass the woman who has done it for so long. Feelings are hurt and trouble brews. We could go on and on!

As we come to our text, two women are at odds with each other in the Philadelphian church, Eoudia (“Success”) and Syntyche (“Lucky”).

We do not know the reason for their estrangement, but Paul calls on them to settle their differences. Apparently people have to walk on eggshells around them. Paul even enlists some of his coworkers to help him bring peace to the congregation. *Then Paul tells them what they can do to allow the peace of God back into their hearts and into the church.*

In this passage we find four instructions for keeping the peace:

I. Unfailing Joy (4:4)

⁴ *Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.*

The idea of joy and rejoicing appears numerous times throughout these four chapters and is the keynote of this epistle. Paul is insistent that we greet every situation with an attitude of joy. Now you are going to say that it is quite impossible to rejoice always. But that is not what the text says! Paul is not saying that you can never be sad. That would be ludicrous, cruel and totally unrealistic. He says “Rejoice in the **Lord** always.” If you really believe that Christ is Lord, that is, that he is the supreme unchallengeable sovereign ruler of the universe, then you can trust in his supremacy when situations appear that seem to say that your world is careening out of control. Just as Paul sang with Silas in prison after they had been beaten bloody and thrown into the stocks, so can you rejoice in difficult situations. Why? Because you know that God is in control. He will ultimately use this exasperating, even devastating, experience to achieve eternal and glorious purposes.

Further, because you are **in the Lord** as a Christian, you are secure in your position and you have all the power needed to face any situation. Rejoicing is an act of the will based on this understanding of the mind. You are fully cognizant of the situation, fully prepared to deal with it responsibly, and fully convinced of the power of the Lord to give you wisdom, grace and courage to deal with whatever comes along. Why? Because in every situation you are focusing on, you are counting your blessings in Christ. You have become so obsessed with valuing Jesus Christ for who he is and what he has done that you are consumed with a relentless longing for the smile of his approval. Therefore nothing else matters anymore. (They are picking on me - it doesn't matter; His idea was accepted by the elders and mine was flat out rejected - it doesn't matter...) We get along when we begin with an attitude of gratitude.

II. Unending Reasonableness (4:5)

⁵ *Let your (sweet) reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand;*

Eoudia and Syntyche were at odds with each other because each one insisted upon her own way and neither one would yield ground. Paul is saying that the mark of a Christian is an uncomplaining readiness to accept others as they are and to submit oneself to their demands. It is the willingness to give up our rights, our pleasures, and even our preferences if we can be a help to someone else in doing so. It is an attitude of grace towards people's faults and mercy in our judgment of their failings. It is a willingness to yield under every trial and a refusal to retaliate when attacked.

Now this attitude goes directly against the culture in which we live. An attitude of sweet reasonableness is demeaning and causes one to look small in the eyes of many. Immediately one asks why anyone would want to be a "doormat" in a society where relationships are often focused on spouting one's grievances, avenging one's wrongs, insisting on one's rights, and fulfilling one's agenda.

For Paul the answer is plain and simple, "The Lord is at hand." Sweet reasonableness was precisely the Lord's attitude towards others when he walked the face of this earth. Would he not be very pleased if he would find us espousing the same attitude at his coming? Christ is ever at our doors and when he comes he will right every wrong and avenge every injustice for those who have given up their rights for the glory of God and the welfare of others. But he is also standing by, ever near us, in our every circumstance. Fear and worry over the loss of prestige, position, or even possessions disappear with the awareness that the one who loves us more than anyone else in the universe provides for us each and every moment. He is here now in the person of the Holy Spirit to give us grace and power for the present, and he will come again to reward us for sweet reasonableness in the future. We get along when we bring a disposition of sweet reasonableness to every situation. We seek to solve problems, not to create problems - to find a solution rather than to criticise.

If you open up your word processing software and start typing, chances are you're looking at a typeface called Times New Roman. It's so common that we take it for granted, but this super-typeface has an interesting origin story. It all began with a complaint. In the 1920s, the esteemed type designer Stanley Morison criticized London's newspaper The Times for being out-of-touch with modern typographical trends. So The Times replied to his complaint by asking him to create something better. Morison took up the challenge. He enlisted the help of expert draftsman Victor Lardent and began conceptualizing a new typeface with two goals in mind: efficiency and readability. Morison wanted any printing in his typeface to be economical, a necessity in the newspaper business. In 1926, The Times tested an early version of Morison's new type. After test upon test and proof upon proof, the final design was approved, and "The Times New Roman" was born. In 1932, The Times specifically noted that their new typeface was not intended for books. But at 82 years old, Times New Roman is still going strong, proving that sometimes there's something better than criticism: become part of the solution instead.

III. Unyielding Hope (4:6)

⁶ do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

Paul has told us how to greet every situation, how to treat every person, and now he tells us how to meet every problem. At the core of conflict resolution is the ability to relax and give everything to God - to take it to the Lord in prayer. There is always hope in the most desperate of situations and the most trying relationships. The release from anxiety can only come from prayer and more prayer.

One dear saint wrote, "Tell God all that is in your heart, as one unloads one's heart, its pleasures and its pains, to a dear friend. Tell him your troubles, that he may comfort you; tell him your joys, that he may sober them; tell him your longings, that he may purify them; tell him your dislikes, that he may help you to conquer them; talk to him of your temptations, that he may shield you from them; show him the wounds of your heart, that he may heal them; lay bare your indifference to good, your depraved taste for evil, your instability. Tell him how self-love

makes you unjust to others, how vanity tempts you to be insincere, how pride disguises the real you to yourself and causes you to harm others.” And when you are done giving him your requests, conclude by giving him your thanks. Expressing your gratitude to God even in this difficult relationship or situation will take the heat out of the wound, the hopelessness and fear out of the anxious heart. The recalling of God’s goodness and mercy will save us from many pitfalls which await the ungrateful soul - overconcern with our immediate problems, forgetfulness of God’s gracious dealings with us and for us in the past, disregard and obsessive concern over the meeting of our own needs at the expense of others.

The Bosnian War during the early 1990s pitted Bosnian Serbs against Muslims, making the sides bitter enemies. But after the war, journalist Chris Hedges heard a story of unusual kindness in the midst of savagery. Rosa and Drago Sorak, a Bosnian Serb couple, told Hedges that during the war the Muslim police took their oldest son, Zoran, away for questioning. He never returned. Five months after Zoran's disappearance, his wife gave birth to a girl. The mother was unable to nurse the child. The city was being shelled and there were severe food shortages. Infants were dying in droves. The family gave the baby tea for five days, but she began to fade. "The baby was dying," Rosa Sorak said. "It was breaking our hearts." But on the fifth day, just before dawn, the Soraks heard someone stomping up to their front door. It was their Muslim neighbor, Fadil Fejzic, one of the few people in town who owned a cow. He was wearing black rubber boots and holding a half a liter of milk. Other families insulted Fadil and told him to let the children of their enemies die. But Fadil, the man with a cow and heavy black rubber boots, kept showing up on their porch—for 442 days in a row, until the Soraks' daughter-in-law and granddaughter left the country. The Soraks said they could never forgive those who took Zoran from them. But they also couldn't forget the kindness of their neighbor Fadil. Drago Sorak said. "The milk he had was precious, all the more so because it was hard to keep animals. He gave us 221 liters. And every year at this time, when it is cold and dark, when we close our eyes, we

can hear the boom of the heavy guns and the sound of Fadil Fejzic on the stairs." In this act lay an ocean of hope."

IV. Unblemished Life (4:8-9)

⁸ 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. ⁹ What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

The final instruction for keeping the peace in our relationship with others is wholesome thinking which will inevitably be followed by wholesome conduct. Just as good food is necessary for good health so are good thoughts necessary for mental and spiritual health. Paul now gives us food for thought. He lists six things that we are to take into account, reflect upon, to give them weight in our decisions, and consequently allow them to shape our conduct. We are to set our minds on them and then plan to act accordingly.

1. Instead of obsessing over mental fantasies of what we believe to be true or focusing on baseless slanders we've heard to be true, we are to fill our thoughts with those things which are valid, honest, reliable, and factual.

2. Instead of obsessing over that which is dishonorable, scandalous or disrespectful, we are to be concerned with that which is noble and honorable - serious as opposed to frivolous.

3. Instead of obsessing over that which is unjust and injurious, we should focus on that which is right and upright.

4. Instead of obsessing over that which is immoral, indecent, filthy or vulgar, we should be concerned with that which is pure, decent and innocent.

5. Instead of obsessing over that which is disagreeable, unattractive, and unpleasing, we should fill our minds with that which is lovely, agreeable, amicable, pleasing, and pleasant.

6. Instead of obsessing over that which is distasteful, worthy of disdain, discreditable, we are to focus on that which is admirable and commendable in others.

***Paul summarizes this list of virtues as being things which exude excellence, measure up to the highest standards, and invoke praise. These are the things that are to be pondered! To say it in another way, if there is such a thing as moral excellence, if there is a kind of behavior that elicits universal approval, than let your mind be obsessed with thinking and doing and being that kind of Christian. This is most certainly the path to conflict resolution and to peaceful and meaningful relationships.

Conclusion: An Unruffled Peace (4:7)

⁷*And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

If we are to allow the peace of God back into our hearts and back into our churches, we would be wise in applying these principles to our daily living and in our daily relationships. A person who exudes joy, a sweet reasonableness, a calmness grounded in their prayer life, and the virtues of an unblemished life is most certainly a person who gets along with others. Their lives are touched with the mark of the supernatural. Theirs is a peace of mind, tranquility of heart, and harmonious interaction with others that is something mysterious and incomprehensible in its own right. They've received a peace from God that cannot be explained or explained away - something which goes well beyond human comprehension or human explanation. People who spend time with them can only suggest that they have come in contact with someone who has been touched by the finger of God. These are people with whom God has made peace and given peace. There is a wholeness and wellness about them. Why? They move about and live their lives with God's peace standing guard at the door of their hearts - keeping anxiety and all other intruders out. Their minds are no longer vulnerable to attack by the enemy. For the army of God, like battle ready soldiers, at every moment surrounds and protects them. No wonder then that we constantly find them building bridges instead of building walls - building up instead of tearing down