
LET YOUR REQUESTS

Philippians 4:4-7
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INTRODUCTION

Good evening. Tonight, we will be continuing our series on complaining. So, I will start with a story on complaining. Last Spring, when I opened my pool, I purchased a 50-pound container of chlorine tabs. When I returned home, I saw I already had a container that was practically full. But I had heard there was shortage on tabs. I thought about hanging on to those tabs just in case. But I thought, surely it won't last all summer? So returned them. Well, I was wrong. The demand for tabs increased due to the pandemic, and secondly, a chemical fire at a facility in Louisiana after Hurricane Laura knocked out one of the three main chlorine manufacturers. The price doubled. I was never able to find anyone who had any in stock all summer. I had these riches right under my nose but didn't realize it. It was as if God was telling me something, but I was not listening. I still kick myself thinking I had this gold mine right under my nose the whole time but didn't see it. All summer long there was a need for those tabs. Yes, I wanted to complain to God. Why had you had me experience that? How do we resolve the tension where our requests really are just another form of complaining? How does God's word address this tension? I will attempt to address this question from Philippians chapter 4. Before we begin, let's pray.

REJOICE IN THE GOSPEL (v.4)

As we pick in verse 4 of chapter 4 Paul is wrapping his letter to the Philippians. The previous paragraph was addressed to specific people within the church of Philippi. Now Paul is switching back to the plural as he gives this imperative.

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

THE CIRCUMSTANCES IN THEIR REJOICING

Paul commands the Philippian church to rejoice always and at all times. Let's take a moment here to look at circumstances Paul and the church of Philippi were facing.

INTERNAL CONFLICT

First, they were facing internal conflict. Paul speaks throughout this entire letter on the importance of the church's unity. He wants to hear of them standing firm in one spirit, with one mind, striving side by side for the faith of the gospel. Therefore, in the previous paragraph, Paul appeals to Euodia and Syntyche to agree in the Lord. Whatever the conflict was between these two believers, it was big enough to be brought to Paul's attention. Maintaining the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace was so important to Paul that he asks the "true companion" to help these women. Interpersonal conflicts can divide and destroy churches. They had lost sight they were all part of a heavenly kingdom whose names were written in the book of life.

EXTERNAL CONFLICT

One of the reasons the unity of the church is so important is because of the conflict it faces externally, from the world. Paul was encouraging their unity and striving side by side in the faith to validate they were not afraid of their opponents. This was to be a clear sign that those outside the church were destined for destruction, but the church's sure salvation from God. That's how they were going to handle external conflict by becoming more unified.

CIRCUMSTANTIAL CONFLICT

Not only was the church facing internal and external conflict, Paul, himself was facing difficulties too. Let us remember He is giving this command and will continue to give this command even though he is in prison. Secondly, he had opponents preaching Christ from envy and rivalry. The intent of their preaching was to afflict him in his imprisonment. But from Paul's perspective, it was having an opposite effect on him. It was causing him to rejoice. To him, all that matter was the name of Christ was preached. Thirdly, his possible execution is looming. Yet Paul continues to rejoice. In his eyes, if he lives it means fruitful ministry, but if he dies, he will be with Christ. His gospel perspective causes him to rejoice for he cannot lose in either case.

PERSONAL PHYSICAL CONFLICT

In addition to all that's already been mentioned, Paul suffered the effects of living in his mortal body. He is longing for the day when Jesus will return "who will transform our lowly body to be like His glorious body." Whether Paul was thinking about failing eyesight or his body that had experience countless beatings, lashes, being stoned, shipwrecked, hunger, sleepless nights, or being left for dead, his response is the same – rejoice!

THE CHARACTER OF THEIR REJOICING

Paul is not promoting a "grin and bear it attitude." Nor he is endorsing a power of positive thinking mentality. The character of their rejoicing is not found in themselves or their circumstances.

IN THE LORD

The character of their rejoicing is to be found "in the Lord." As one author puts it, "the Philippians are not to naively rejoice in their disunity, their suffering, the threat of false teachers, or persecution; rather, their joy is in the Lord, who is their hope of eternal life despite their present circumstance."¹

We can see the logic of Paul's thinking as he concludes the previous paragraph. Paul is thinking about Euodia, Syntche, Clement, and the rest of his fellow workers in the gospel. He is rehearsing and rejoicing that their names are written in the book of life. They are all truly citizens of heaven.

You may recall that Jesus taught the same lesson in Luke's gospel, chapter 10, verse 17-20. When the 72 returned, when He had sent them out, there were rejoicing because even the demons were subject to

¹ Keown, M. J. (2017). *Philippians*. (H. W. House, W. H. Harris III, & A. W. Pitts, Eds.) (Vol. 2, p. 332). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

them in His name. However, Jesus told them not to rejoice in this, but to rejoice that their names are written in heaven. Isn't that enough for us to rejoice over?

AT ALL TIMES

When our rejoicing is in the Lord then we can always rejoice. Our circumstances in this world are always changing but God never changes. His promises are sure, steady, and true. We know that all of our circumstances, whether in suffering or triumph, are all soaked with purpose. We are easily rattled when difficulty hits. It can be a major diagnosis or daily discontentment. When we take our eyes off of Christ, our rejoicing is powerless and limited.

REPEATEDLY

Paul knows this. This is why he repeats himself. Rejoice in the Lord, again, I say rejoice. If we make it through this day despite our conflicts and struggles, Paul says he will remind us again tomorrow to rejoice. In light of what was previously said, this has weight because it's like preaching the gospel to yourself every day. You can repeatedly rejoice because you are reminding yourself about your heavenly citizenship, setting your mind on the things above and not on the things of earth.

REPRESENT THE GOSPEL (v.5)

Only as we continue to learn to rejoice in the gospel will it enable us to represent the character and person of Jesus.

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

IN THEIR POSTURE

Paul highlights one particular trait in his command to the Philippian church. That one trait is reasonableness. It speaks of treating each other with gentleness, clemency, tolerance, and not insisting on flawless obedience. One commentator explains it this way, "It signifies 'a humble, patient steadfastness, which is able to submit to injustice, disgrace, and maltreatment without hatred or malice, trusting God in spite of it all.'"² To sum up, it is humble and tolerant.

IN HUMILITY

Pride is its opposite. Pride seeks self-preservation and exultation. It is intolerant and unwilling to bend. Pride will fight to the bitter end to justify itself. It will not let go of injustices no matter how small they are. It seeks restitution and self-righteous exultation. But as citizens of heaven we are to *"Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."*

TO ALL PEOPLES

Biblical humility desires restoration and reconciliation over retaliation and self-righteous justification. Biblical humility is the power that undercuts the power structures of this world. And it undercuts the power struggle in

² Leivestad, R., ' "The Meekness and Gentleness of Christ" II Cor. X.1', NTS 13 (1965-66), 156-164

conflicts. Not only are we display this gentleness to our brothers and sisters in Christ, but to all the world. Paul has already written, ¹⁴ *Do all things without grumbling or disputing,* ¹⁵ *that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world,* ¹⁶ *holding fast to the word of life...* WE are the light of the world. Let it shine to all peoples everywhere.

IN THEIR PERSPECTIVE

We are to represent the gospel in our posture to all people based on our perspective. The Lord is at hand. This statement appears to stand alone because of the absence of conjunctions tying it to the previous sentence or the one following. So what does he mean he does it mean when he says the Lord is at hand? Is it Christ's proximity to us or is he referring to His return? I believe it is both.

IN PROXIMITY

The Lord is close to us in proximity. The Psalmist writes,

⁸ If I ascend to heaven, you are there!
If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!
⁹ If I take the wings of the morning
and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
¹⁰ even there your hand shall lead me,
and your right hand shall hold me.
¹¹ If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me,
and the light about me be night,"
¹² even the darkness is not dark to you;
the night is bright as the day,
for darkness is as light with you.

There is nowhere we can go to flee the Spirit of God. Rest in that he is near.

IN TIME

In terms of time, his return is eminent. Jesus doesn't know the day and time but he warns his disciples even 2000 years ago be ready. Remember, *"with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day"*, (2 Peter 3:8).

It can be easy to take our eyes off of Christ. When we do, we may see only injustice, conflict, persecution, and strife. But as we lift our eyes to the hills, where our help comes from, we see Jesus. He is near. Make no mistake brothers and sisters, the day of recompense and vengeance on our enemies, looms just over the horizon.

REST IN THE GOSPEL (V.6)

How do we do all of this amid some of our struggles and aggravations? By resting in the gospel.

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

THE COMMAND

First, this is a command. Being anxious is a sin. Recognize this first. Being anxious is not a liberty issue. It is a sin issue. When you are anxious, you lack faith in Jesus. Look, Paul does not minimize situations and circumstances. He knows what this church is facing, would cause all kinds of fear and anxiety. But Jesus has not left us to our own

devices in our battles over this sin. There is a way to overcome these battles of anxiety and fear. It is by making our requests known to God. This is the summary of this command, “do not be anxious but in everything...let your request be made known to God.”

THE CIRCUMSTANCE

But we are not to wait for anxious thoughts and disgruntled hearts to arise before we speak to God. We are to reach out to Him in everything and in all things. This too encompasses both time and situation. He does not say, pray only when you are anxious. No, he says “in everything”. Pray when you become worried and pray when you are perfectly content and at peace. Pray in every and all situations. One author put it this way, “Prayer is to include all our interests, small and great. Nothing is too great for God’s power; nothing too small for his fatherly care.”³

THE CHANNEL

Without surprise, our communication channel is prayer. Whether it is corporate or personal. It is through prayer we are to make our thoughts known to God. Paul utilizes two terms separate terms here, prayer and supplication. The first, refers to common communication and petitions. But the second refers to those times when we may be surprised by severe situations and thoughts. It is an urgent request to meet a need. It is a cry out to God when trial or tragedy hit unexpectedly.

THE CONDITION

And we are to do this with thanksgiving. Paul considers that a Christian life should overflow with a grateful attitude at all times, in all situations, in all things, and for all people. This is remarkable and shows a great confidence in the sovereignty of God despite the situation believers are in, no matter how difficult and perilous. Thanksgiving to God is the foundation of all prayer and life itself. It requires meditation and remembering, seeing God’s hand in all of life. It is an essential element of confessing Christ as Lord (2:9–11), of heavenly citizenship (1:27), of working out one’s salvation (2:12), and of pressing on (3:12, 14); a Christian’s life flows out of gratitude.⁴

THE COMMUNICATION

God knows our situations, our struggles, our trials, our weaknesses before we do. But His desire is our dependence. He desires His people to depend on Him. This privilege to cry out to our Lord Jesus, at any time, came at a cost. We can draw near to the throne of grace because we have a high priest who able to sympathize with our weaknesses. Our high priest purchased this privilege with His very life.

THE RESULTS OF THE GOSPEL (v.7)

Therefore, “do not be anxious about anything but in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

THE PEACE

Please note the results of gospel prayers? It is not answers to your requests in the way you want. It is not removal of obstacles or conflict. No, the result is peace. We bring, and sometimes wrestle, our requests before the throne

³ Keown, M. J. (2017). [Philippians](#). (H. W. House, W. H. Harris III, & A. W. Pitts, Eds.) (Vol. 2, p. 343). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

⁴ Ibid, p. 346

of God. He listens to our cries and pleas. But then we are to submit ourselves before Him. We acknowledge His character and bow ourselves to His feet, and say, “your will be done.” When we do this, then the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, becomes a power. It is the peace of Christ, which is accessible to all believers at all times through prayer and from the Spirit. It recalls Isa 26:3: “You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you”. It witnesses to those around us. When the storms and trials of life surround us, and we can rest in God’s sovereign will for us. When our bank accounts are empty, our diagnosis is poor, when our ministries are shrinking, we don’t panic. We cry out to our heavenly Father, but trust in His sovereign care for us. We then have peace. This peace transcends understanding.

THE PROTECTION

And this peace acts as a protection. It is not produced of ourselves, nor do we own it. It is provided by Christ. I want you to take a moment and think of the temple. In the middle of it, lies the Holy of Holies. The one place only the priest could enter. When he enters the Holy of Holies, he is the closest any man will be to the very presence of God. That is why there was much preparation needed before one could enter it. When we pray, bringing our requests to Him, we are entering into the Holy of Holies. We have entered the very presence of God. We are surrounded by His power, presence, and loving protection. We have no ritual to follow. We are always, clean enough, pure enough, and holy enough to enter His presence because of the blood of Christ. We are in the most intimate place any human being could be in. There is no safer place to be in that moment. And, if we bring every single care and concern at all times before Him, then we are in that place at all times. Fully protected by the peace of God. Many strove in the past to enter that rest and did not enter because they did not believe. We can do so simply by faith.

REFLECT AND RESPOND

How does all of this pertain to complaining?

First, of all, are you rejoicing on the gospel? Or do your circumstances overcome your faith in Christ? Does your discontentment override your faith in Christ?

When you are discontent with your life, where do you run to first?

Do you see your prayer life as the most precious opportunity to spend time with your heavenly Father? Our relationship and communication with the Father is of the utmost importance. If not, He would not have sent His son to as the full and final sacrifice for us. He has secured our entrance into the Holy of Holies so that we can have communion with Him.

Do you rejoice in the gospel because of this?

How do you respond when you have “prayed” about something, and nothing has changed? Do you become disgruntled and discontented? In the garden of Gethsamene, Matthew records that Jesus prayed to His Father to let this cup pass from Him. After the third time he arose and faced His betrayal, torture, and crucifixion. Paul prayed three times for his thorn to be removed before hearing the Lord say His grace was sufficient for him. Now, I am not making the claim that this is a model to follow. That you get to asked three times and you’re done. But I believe there comes a point when you must stop asking start accepting the Lord’s good, wise, and sovereign will for your situation. You cannot rejoice in the Lord when you are resisting His will. Remember, Jesus didn’t just reluctantly accept the Father’s will for Him. Hebrews tells, for it was the joy that was set before Him that he endured the cross, despising the shame.