

## Christ is my Life—studies in Philippians (5)

# Peace in Christ Philippians 4

We conclude this series on 'Christ is my Life' in Philippians by looking at a range of issues and circumstances faced by us all in life.

- 'Peace' is twice used of God in this chapter (vv. 7, 9) and this is the arena in which we live. The term as Paul would understand it (*shalom* in Hebrew) conveys general wellbeing, good relationships with God and our neighbours. The Greek word (*irene*) gives us our English word 'irenic' (= 'with a view to peace').
- We all have highs and lows of various kinds in this world but cannot derive our true situation from them. Our life is Christ.
- The teaching in this passage is not merely an ethic to be lived because Christ is Lord, but rather, a life formed, led and enabled by God because we live in Christ.
- The phrase 'in Christ' occurs eight times in the letter and is a unifying thread throughout the letter (so G. Walter Hansen). God has come to us in Christ, and we live to God in Christ.

### Agreement in the Lord (vv. 2-3)

Two of Paul's fellow-workers are now at loggerheads. Without Paul's strong lead, they can't, or won't, get on and the welfare of the church is in danger.

- They are told, publicly, to agree in the Lord, and the church must help them do so.
- The need for unity has already been addressed (1:27; 2:2-3).
- We have been given the mind of Christ to have together (2:2-5).
- Loss of love may well also lead to the loss of faith and hope. It is important for the three to grow together.
- Living in peace is vital for the church and its mission in the world (cf. Jam. 3:16-18).

### Rejoicing in the Lord (vv. 4, 10)

Joy is an essential ingredient of faith.

- Joy seems to be negated by suffering, but Paul will not agree with that (2:17).
- It is 'safe' to talk about joy (3:1) and this may relate to the ability to deal with heresy that Paul then raises.
- Joy is probably the 'environment' in which Paul speaks of the rest of our life in Christ (vv. 1, 4, 10). Out of joy in Christ comes a freedom from 'having to have' many other things that we rely on for joy.
  - Paul's joy when he receives a gift is because of the care the Philippians have shown him, not mere relief at having food in the cupboard.
  - He has learned, been taught by the Lord, to be content with much or little. He probably didn't learn it quickly! And he calls it a 'secret'—that is, special knowledge known to him and to the Lord who stood by him (e.g. Acts 23:11; 2 Tim. 4:17).
- In the context of this joy, we find out about reasonableness, prayers with thanksgiving and thinking about many good things.

## Nearness of the Lord (vv. 5-7)

Several things tumble together here.

- First, reasonableness or gentleness. This is not what we have within our own micro culture. Neither is it agreeing when we *should* disagree. But it is the glue that enables people with differing views to live together. How can this be achieved and maintained?
- Second, anxieties. These often have real causes and don't yield to glib denials. How can we obey this command?
  - Cf. the positive uses of this word in the NT relate to concern for others (e.g. 2:20; 1 Cor. 7:33; 12:25; 2 Cor. 11:28).
- We have a Lord who is greater than the contest we are in, and greater than the suffering that threatens.
- We have a Lord who is near. This may indicate the Lord's promised presence with us now, or his return. Both may be intended and both are important.
- What does this look like?
  - It is prayer and entreaty—accepting that this is where we are in life and looking to him to do what only he can do.
  - It becomes our visible testimony to the world—our reasonableness is visible to everyone.
- But the source of our reasonableness, or our peace in the midst of threats, is God himself being at peace. He is the God of peace—that is, he is at peace with himself and shares what he is with those who trust him.
- His way of making peace is through Christ (Rom. 5:1), through the blood of his cross (Eph. 2:16). Because it is moral it is eternal and persuasive to the anxious sinner.
- In this way, God keeps our hearts—affections and will, and thought processes—in Christ Jesus—that is, not that he keeps us *in Christ*, but that, *in Christ*, he guards our hearts and minds. There are enemies aplenty but the God of peace keeps us.

## Healthy thinking (vv. 8-9)

- What does it look like to walk in the peace of God?
  - We are given things to think on and things to do and told the God of peace will be with us. Here is a dance in which we know who is leading but in which we take and active part.
- We are to reflect on good things, things that everyone knows are good.
  - Paul's list of virtuous action is similar to lists compiled by Greek philosophers of the day. So, in this setting, whatever is true would refer to what is real in life—rather than revealed truth.
  - The difference between believers and unbelievers is not that they do wrong and we do right but that we know what can sustain us in doing what is right and confess our need of grace to walk truly.
- His expansive list suggests there is plenty to occupy our minds.
- The world has not forgotten what is good. Nor does it lack the capacity to admire it.
- When the world fails, or we fail to do what is good, we may begin to think morosely or fearfully. However, the Lord is present, and God is giving us his peace. We are not back in Eden, but we are assured of getting there and can afford to think generously and warmly about our life along the way.
- Christ's work of bringing us to peace with God and with what he is about with us, frees us to look at the whole creation as something God is working in for his glory. (Cf. Isa. 57:18-21.)
- We don't need to join the world in its preoccupation with things that are wrong or broken. It may be our hope in God for a better world, and our recurring hope that we can be part of it, that will attract an unbeliever to the God of peace.
- 'Do what you've seen me do' says Paul. Our thinking is a blueprint for action.