

Philippians 4:1–5 (NKJV)

1 Therefore, my beloved and longed-for brethren, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, beloved. **2** I implore Euodia and I implore Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. **3** And I urge you also, true companion, help these women who labored with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the Book of Life. **4** Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! **5** Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand.

(The remaining text

3 And I urge you also, true companion, help these women who labored with me in the gospel, ///with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the Book of Life. **4** Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! **5** Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand.)

Last week we ended in the middle of verse 3 in our text. This morning I hope to finish up to verse 5. I am a bit nervous at this point in our study. The reason is that the **passage we will embark on next** is one of the most important **passages** to address one of the most **perplexing problems** in our society. Anxiety. And frankly, I don't want to blow it. I urge you all to study verses 6-9. I know that many of you are very familiar with these verses because you turn to them in times of trouble. I hope that we can dive into the depths of these verses in such a way that it produces **even better habits** of **thinking** and **living** than we have experienced previously. I think it is such an important topic that we should dedicate one of our Thursday evening meetings to discussing it. It will be a chance for you all to share how **you** apply these verses so that we are all built up by what God is doing in our body. It would be good for any who **feel willing** to **share their stories**. We will meet here on May 18 for that meeting. I have a hunch that your insights and your testimony as to how **you** apply these verses may have more impact than my preaching of them.

Ok, to our text that prepares for what is ahead.

Paul has urged someone, I think Luke, to help Euodia **You o dia'** and Syntyche **Sun took' A** to work out their differences that are causing a lack of Gospel proclamation. Paul knows the dangers of small cracks in relationships in the body. So he, in a rare move, makes them **highly public** and assigns one of his team, ready or not, to take the problem head on. I have a feeling this true

companion is entering a world of fireworks that he would prefer to avoid. But it is **his job now** and he must do it.

How many problems arise in even our families and our church due to wanting to avoid conflict? How many times do we find ourselves in this true companion's place, but we do nothing because doing what needs done would be difficult or messy? It is nearly always easier temporarily to do nothing. But when we do nothing in the face of divisive situations, the devil wins. Again, this is not to say that every perceived miff or insult needs addressed. Sometimes we need to humble ourselves and realize that this thing that someone has done to me is the same thing I do to others. Sometimes we just need to remove ourselves from being the most important thing in our world, and these kinds of things might just disappear. But if this thing lingers, if it is the first thing we think of when we think of someone in the body, it is time to do business with it. If it is a crack that is growing wider in the fellowship of the body, it is time for action. And if we as elders know about cracks like that, if they are becoming obvious in the body, it is we who are responsible to address the problem, even if those involved will not initiate it like they should.

OK let's move on in the text.

3 And I urge you also, true companion, help these women who labored with me in the gospel, ///with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the Book of Life.

From what I understand where it says "with Clement also" this is probably looking back to the phrase "who labored with me in the gospel" rather than to the phrase "help these women". I can just see these people sighing a sigh of relief knowing that they didn't have the job of helping the two ladies work out their difficulties. We don't know who Clement is. He was probably a Philippian Christian. And one can just imagine Paul writing this. Haven't we all been in this spot? We are giving credit for those who helped in some task. And we mention one person. Then we think better of trying to name everyone because we are sure to forget someone. So we create a category that the people we might leave out will put themselves in.

So Paul says "the rest of my fellow workers".

The next phrase is interesting. **whose names are in the Book of Life.** Might you feel left out if you were working with Paul and he mentions Clement but does not mention your name? Isn't it always nice to be recognized for good work we do?

Well I think Paul covers those omissions admirably. Every one of those fellow workers is **noticed by God** and are written on **His** list.

I took some time to look at the references to the Book of Life. I know it is one of those topics that presents an apparent contradiction to Sovereign Grace theology. Sovereign Grace theology says that God had ordained, from the beginning of time, who He would save and who He would not. So that would mean the names would be written in His book of life, the book of the saved, from the beginning of time and never change. But when we read about the Book of Life in scripture we see things we would not expect.

If I were to argue the Armenian position, a large part of the argument would be based on the reference to names being removed from the books. An argument can be made against that being the case. But it is a difficult argument.

Never the less, Here we see how it really works out.

Revelation 20:12–15 (NKJV)

12 And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. 13 The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. 14 Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. 15 And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.

We see from this that God keeps good records. I am really curious what these books consist of. I suspect even the word “books” doesn’t accurately catch what they are. But it is storage of information and names. That is kind of amazing in itself. Even our names matter.

But anyway, the point is that all of the people that Paul refers to in the text, even the two ladies who could not get along, were solidly in the Christian camp. This is both comforting and disturbing. While it is so very good to know that we can mess up royally and still find ourselves in Christ. It is disturbing that we can be blessed with **so many blessings** and a **victorious past**, only to be overcome by ego and pride and self centeredness at some point in our future. Our eyes truly need to be fixated on that **finish line** with the goal of what we receive always in mind.

Now Paul moves on from his appointment of his relational referee. He leads us into the proper state that we must always find ourselves in. We will just begin that passage today.

4 Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!

Now how can Paul command a feeling?

That is really a question we need to ask.

Have you ever tried to change a feeling? It is always interesting to watch small children. How upset they can get at the stupidest things, things we can see are **not at all worth the trouble**. And when does that emotion change? It is almost always when they **change focus**. When they **think** about something else. When they begin **doing** something else. Eventually most children even learn that about themselves. They learn they can determine how they feel. But it is never by aiming at the emotion. The change does not come by trying to make sadness turn into gladness. We aren't wired that way. We do not have direct control over how we feel.

I remember having a shot of valium prior to an operation. I was amazed at how that chemical could make me feel. So in that sense there was a direct relationship with something that was done to me and how I felt about it. Our bodies have the capacity to physiological events to directly create feelings. . But that is not usually the case.

We humans are created in a predictable manner. How we feel normally follows how we think. I **talk** about this a lot because scripture **refers** to it a lot.

So how do we have joy? How do we express joy? How do we rejoice? How do we obey this command when we are distracted by this pesky fight between two church members? How do we obey this command when we have just been given the job to straighten them out? How do we obey this command when our feelings are the opposite of wanting to rejoice? That is the context in Philippians. The answer?

We think about **truths** that produce the feelings we hope to have.

We do **activities** that remind us of truths that produce joy.

We do the activities that we would do if we really believed what we say we believe.

We **give praise** to God for who He is. We give thanks for what He has done in the **past** and what He promises for the **future**. We choose the thoughts we must think to give adequate praise to God. And by so doing we are reorienting our minds.

We have **no** direct control over what we **feel**. We have nearly absolute direct control over that which we **think about**. That is why the secret to sanctification is found not in what we feel but in what we think.

Romans 12:1–2 (NKJV)

1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

When I get on facebook, I often look at political posts and financial posts. So then the algorithms in facebook begin to give me a steady diet of those things I looked at. And the more I read, the more I stress. The more I focus on the problems, the more hopeless I get. I can ruin a perfectly good day that God has given me with 20 minutes of reading. That is how we are designed. That is an example of being conformed to this world. That is allowing my focus to be brought down to the here and now reality as if that is some kind of **ultimate** reality.

God's word calls us away from that kind of thinking, that kind of focus, that kind of conformity. Our minds are to be renewed. We are to think God thoughts. As a result of **God-thoughts** in our minds, our selves become transformed. Our selves become different. And it increases our capacity to **know and do** the things that God most wants us to **know and do**. We begin to focus and understand the perfect will of God. The will that is perfect for us because it is that which most glorifies God.

AW Tozer was the editor of the Christian and Missionary Alliance magazine that was part of my growing up. It was called the Alliance Witness. Mr Tozer's was usually the only article I read in the magazine. AW Tozer wrote a book called "The Knowledge of the Holy" In it Tozer wrote this. You have probably heard it before. He says this,

What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.

The history of mankind will probably show that no people has ever risen above its religion/ and man's spiritual history will positively demonstrate that no religion has ever been greater than its idea of God. Worship is pure or base as the worshiper entertains high or low thoughts of God.

For this reason the gravest question before the Church is always God Himself, and the most portentous fact about any man is not what he, at a given time,

may say or do, but what he, in his deep heart, conceives God to be like. We tend by a secret law of the soul to move toward our mental image of God. This is true not only of the individual Christian, but of the company of Christians that composes the Church. Always, the most revealing thing about the Church is her idea of God, just as her most significant message is what she says about Him or leaves unsaid, for her silence is often more eloquent than her speech. She can never escape the self-disclosure of her witness concerning God.

Were we able to extract from any man a complete answer to the question, “What comes into your mind when you think about God?” we might predict with certainty the spiritual future of that man. (Reprint; New York: Harper & Row, 1975, 9)

AW Tozer was a prophetic voice of his time. His teachings leaned very far toward the Sovereign Grace side of things, although he was probably regarded as an Armenian. If you want to read any of his books let me know. I have some. His point is that **everything** gravitates from how **we**, in our heart of hearts, view God. I find great encouragement in how many of you, over the years, have shared with me how you **used to** view God compared to how you **view him today**. And really, has that not led you to more joy and peace. The more you view God as he truly is, do you not find yourself being glad? Our relationship with God through Christ whereby we gain the full advantage of God for ourselves is that spring of **greatest joy**. No truth can destroy it. No situation can remove it. So Paul can tell us to **rejoice**, because we have a position we can **rejoice about**. If we will choose to think about our life's position, we have all the rejoice fuel we could possibly need.

Now take note, we do not get any impression at all that Paul is going to hear a “but Paul” from his listeners that will change this command.

This is very important. We might have a tendency to look at this and say, yes, that is good advice for me when things are going well in my life. That is good advice when I am feeling happy. That is good advice when my circumstances change for the better. But for now that is impossible.

But when Paul lays out how to **follow this command**, he shows us how to **think about** our circumstances and then how to think **above** our circumstances. What Paul does is similar to what we do with kids when they are upset. We try to redirect their focus. What Paul will tell us in the coming verses lifts up our eyes to heaven. He puts our eyes on our salvation. He does not say that we have no reason for sadness, but He tells us we have greater reason for a joy that will last through it. We really need to get this. Sometimes things that happen **hurt us to**

the core. There is no need to pretend that is not true. Jesus wept over life situations. So we should not think that we would do otherwise. We suffer loss. We suffer hurt. That is to be expected. Joy would not be such a big deal if life did not make clinging to joy hard.

We need to be very careful here. This is a test of how much we believe the Bible. If in our minds we can come up with a “yes, but” response to what Paul is saying, we need to pay close attention to what we are saying to ourselves. We need to ask “**who says**”? Some psychology books stumble upon the truth of how God has wired us. They actually just put in different words what God’s word reveals. But much of what is called the current science of psychology comes from a naturalist secular humanist mindset, the mindset that say “**I am and there is none besides**”. We need to remember that the Holy Spirit that moved the writing of the Bible is the **creator** of our bodies and minds. He created us so he understands us. He knows what works. He knows what is true. So the Bible is our source to go to to find out how to **resolve** the problems we have with our thoughts and feelings. And even though we look at what we are experiencing and we want to say, there is no way that what Paul is talking about is **even possible** in my situation, we are wise to silence ourselves. We are wise to say, let God be true and everyone else a liar. And we humble ourselves before our maker, calling out to Him to help us **apply** what He says because **we trust Him more** than any other source of information. God will help us. He promises that help over and over again. But he will not help us to believe the lies we tell to ourselves to **avoid** doing business with His truth.

Pain, suffering, concern for others that is unsettling, all of those things the Bible teaches us to expect. This command to rejoice does not **replace** those things. Those feelings may be perfectly appropriate. But when they drive us to fret, when they drive us to despair, when they drive us to a faithless reaction, when they drive us to unbelief in the goodness of God, that **is** a problem. But when we just experience those negative emotions and painful situations without allowing them the chance to **define anything about the character of God**, and we cling to our faith, and we believe that God means what He commands, we are in good standing.

4 Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!

The great wonderful amazing thing about this truth is, if we are **commanded** to do this, we, with God’s help are **ABLE** to do this. We can become people that, no matter what the circumstances, we reorient our thinking to that which we have

forever. And while things in this life can be crushing, that which we have **forever** puts it into perspective. It does not remove pain. But it allows for a foundation of something good to grow under it.

We will have more to say about this topic when Paul brings it back up next week. Now we will close by looking at verse 5.

5 Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand.

The word for gentleness is a very tough word to translate. It means lots of things. I will quote John MacArthur's study:

Epieikēs (gentle spirit) has a richer meaning than any single English word can convey. Hence, commentators and Bible versions vary widely in how they render it. Sweet reasonableness, generosity, goodwill, friendliness, magnanimity, charity toward the faults of others, mercy toward the failures of others, indulgence of the failures of others, leniency, bigheartedness, moderation, forbearance, and gentleness are some of the attempts to capture the rich meaning of epieikēs. Perhaps the best corresponding English word is graciousness—the graciousness of humility; the humble graciousness that produces the patience to endure injustice, disgrace, and mistreatment without retaliation, bitterness, or vengeance. It is contentment.

Gracious humility runs counter to the cult of self-love that was rampant in ancient society, and is rampant in modern society as well. But focusing on self-love, self-esteem, and self-fulfillment leads only to greater and greater instability and anxiety. On the other hand, those whose focus is not on themselves cannot be knocked off balance by inequity, injustice, unfair treatment, lies, or humiliation. They can say with Paul, "I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am" (4:11). Spiritual stability belongs to the graciously humble.

John F. MacArthur Jr., *Philippians*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 2001), 276.

This may be an early clue about where Paul is headed regarding anxiety. This kind of gentleness holds an eternal perspective towards one's self. It sees one's self in light of where we are now and where we will be.

The Lord is at hand.

This could mean he is close **in time** or close **in proximity**. Given that David gives so many quotes that He is close in proximity, that may be the better interpretation. But both are true.

Psalm. 34:18; 75:1; 119:151; 145:18

We of all people have reason to rejoice. Our Lord is always close to us. He promises to be with us. And He is coming back for us. We are, of all people, most blessed.

All of this is building into a world view that sets us free from the cruel grip of anxiety. Anyone who has been gripped by anxiety knows just how cruel that feeling can be. Brother Paul is setting the stage for the release he wants to provide us with.

Some possible applications are- think about “When I **think of God**, who do I think He **really** is? What do I **really think** He thinks of me? Do I actually trust Him to be to me all the things **He says He is?**” We may find that some of our trouble in **obeying** God is very logical to what **we think of Him**. If we think He is cold and stern and unloving, it will be terribly hard to obey Him. If we think that He deeply and warmly loves His children, it will be much easier.

Also we may want to examine what we allow our minds **to focus on** during the day, and to see what effects that has on our moods and our feelings. Try experimenting with changes you can make to **change the content** you take in and watch the effects of those changes. Our minds is where the spiritual business gets done.