

June 4, 2017  
Sunday Morning Service  
Series: Peace in Chaos  
Community Baptist Church  
643 S. Suber Road  
Greer, SC 29650  
© 2017 David J. Whitcomb

**THINK RIGHT, DO RIGHT, ENJOY PEACE**  
**Philippians 4:1-9**

Most of you are aware that this assembly is in the process of thinking seriously about building a new building. To many people that is an overwhelming thought. The idea of constructing a huge building that costs a lot of money makes them nervous. To others, it's no big deal. Then there are people who give very little thought to where building projects like houses or malls or educational facilities for the church come from. They almost act as though those buildings just sort of appear. We who are on the inside of the projects know that the completion of a useful building is a process of steps beginning with a concept, the concept is put on paper, and contractors follow the instructions on the paper.

The same process is necessary for building the vehicles that you drove to the meeting this morning. Cars do not just miraculously show up on the dealers' lots. A trip to the local BMW manufacturing plant is very profitable if you wonder how these intricate machines are created. As you tour the plant, you will discover again that it is a process that begins with the most basic, foundational parts. Those parts move through an assembly line where more parts are added until voila' there is a new BMW.

Likewise, you enjoy and appreciate the ministry of music in our meetings. But you should know that our instrumentalists did not just sit down at a piano or organ or pick up a horn and start playing. That is a rare occurrence. Rather our musicians began a process of building basic principle on basic principle through practice for many years. They just kept following the instructions until now they are able to edify all of us through their gifts and talents.

And you would like to experience peace in this very chaotic world. You don't achieve that peace instantaneously through some kind of miracle. But didn't we just study Romans 5:1 the other day that promises us: *Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1)*. That sounds pretty instantaneous! Yes, we are instantly changed from enemy of God to child of God at salvation. At that moment, we who were at enmity with God begin to experience peace with God.

But peace in a life of interacting with others is a process that takes time and practice. Other folks, even Christian folks, are not perfect like God. Nor are we. As a result, lack of peace can be a common experience – even in the church. It reminds me of what one saint concluded:

To live above with saints we love;  
O that will be glory.  
But to live below with saints we know;  
Now that's a different story.

Some people respond to the problem of interpersonal conflict by running away. That never solves the problem because the runner will always run into another conflict that results in lack of peace.

God has a better plan. God's plan is for us to follow the instructions one step at a time just like building a house or a car or learning a skill. Paul gave us great instruction along these lines in his letter to the Christians at Philippi. One thing that is so encouraging about the New Testament letters is that they were written to real people just like us. So often the issues they dealt with are the issues we try to work through. The issue in the church at Philippi was no different.

There were some folks in that assembly who didn't see eye-to-eye. The context that surrounds this mention of the conflict is the instruction we need for solving similar conflicts so that we can experience the peace God intends for us to have. Let's learn from this instruction the various steps we need to take to solve disagreements and live in the peace that is beyond human comprehension.

## Right Living Fosters Peace (vv.1-7).

The first six verses of Philippians chapter four lay down very practical exhortations about right living. First, the Lord requires that His people stand firm. *Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved (v.1).* Notice that this is instruction for beloved family members. While the principles here are good for anyone who desires to live a peaceful life, they are of particular interest to the Believers.

Paul referred to them as brothers he loved. Brothers is the fitting word to describe family members. All of the believers in the church as Philippi, as well as all of us who trust Christ are part of God's family, joint heirs with the Beloved Son Jesus Christ. Because they are equally family members they are loved like God the Father loved His Son. When Jesus was baptized, *behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17).* Do we have that same attitude toward each other?

Furthermore, the brothers are longed for. Maybe that means that Paul desired to see them. Or it could also mean that he simply desired to be in their company. To be with them would be the desire if the person truly saw the people as his joy and crown. The people actually were a source of joy for Paul. Thinking about them brought joy to his heart. That is not to say that people alone were Paul's source of joy. That never works because people are undependable. Rather, the people brought joy to Paul's heart because they were his crown. God had given the believers in Philippi to Paul as His reward (Acts 16).

Philippi was the first city in Macedonia (Europe) to receive the gospel. In a short stay by Paul, Lydia and her family were saved. Other "brothers" are mentioned in the city. Possibly Timothy and Luke continued the ministry for a time. The church is singled out twice in Paul's letters as an exemplary body of believers (Phil. 4; 2 Cor. 9).

Paul saw the people of Philippi as God's reward to him. Money, fame, human honors didn't move Paul. He was joyful that God had given these individuals as fruit for His labors. The people were Paul's joy in that Paul rejoiced in God's grace to them.

That truth causes us to stop and consider if fellow Christians bring us joy because we see them as God's reward. They will if we

observe spiritual growth as they become like Christ. If we sacrifice and pour energy and time into individuals, we will be delighted to see them respond. They will be our beloved because they are objects of our love, our willing sacrifice for their spiritual benefit.

To people who are growing in faith in Christ comes the challenge to stand firm "like this" in the Lord. Paul had every right to challenge the people to stand. And it is a necessary challenge because it is human nature to grow weary in well doing. We all live in danger of becoming lukewarm in our relationship with Christ. We do live in danger of falling into sin. If we love others, we very much desire that they will stand unmoveable, abounding in the work of the Lord.

But notice the measurement of "standing firm." Paul said "like this" which means he was about to explain what it means to stand firm. We should be embarrassed if our "reward" people think we are the standard of Christian righteous living. Personal preference must always give way to Bible truth and Bible doctrine. When God challenges us to stand, His parameters for where we stand are the principles of His Word. Following are the principles that make up Christian living.

First, we are to be busying edifying others. *I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life (vv.2-3).* Obviously, there was a sticky situation in the church at Philippi. Two women in the church did not agree. Either they didn't agree with each other or together they disagreed with the rest of the assembly. There is no hint of the center or issue of conflict.

In light of modern Christian experience, we will probably be quite accurate to conclude it was matters of personal preference. Typically, personal preference overrides Bible truth. We have all seen it from time to time and should admit that holding personal preference to the point of causing conflict is just plain old pride. Is it fair or justifiable to conclude that personal preference was the problem? Probably, yes, in light of the solution Paul presented.

The solution was for people to get involved to help the two women agree in the Lord. “In the Lord” refers to the Lord’s teaching which reveals the Lord’s character. We would also call that doctrine. Other faithful and maturing believers were enlisted to come alongside to help.

The same principle applies in our modern setting. Why is this such an important matter? Resolving conflicts is part of spiritual maturity. If we refuse to do this, we will never learn how not to be proud. I fear that people who walk away simply because of personal preference will make that a pattern so that every few years they MUST walk away again. It’s kind of like Elizabeth Taylor’s inability to come to terms with any of her five husbands. It would appear that Elizabeth firmly believed that life was for her pleasure and anyone who made life uncomfortable had to change or had to go. If the truth were known in the greater Greenville area, it would become clear that far more people have separated from assemblies over personal preference than over doctrine. Helping people mature out of the stubbornness of their preferences is the ministry of each individual in the assembly.

Second, as we are standing firm *in the Lord*, helping others resolve conflict, we are to rejoice. *Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice (v.4)*. Obviously rejoice is the key word in this challenge. We are commanded (if you can imagine that) to experience the aspect of the fruit of the Spirit called “joy.” How can we rejoice when the world is infected with sin? How can we rejoice when people around us reject God and His truth? How can we rejoice when even people in the assembly are disagreeable because they are not living like Christ?

The object and source of our joy is Jesus Christ, not the disagreeable people. Our joy must be rooted in our relationship with Christ. He is always right, always faithful, always sinless. Of course the difficulty is maintaining a relationship with Him who we cannot see. Nevertheless we find Him to be our help and hope as we find it in the words, instruction, letters He has written to us. Also, helping us is the Comforter, Helper, Holy Spirit who lives within and testifies about Jesus. It is an important reminder that abiding joy cannot be found in circumstances. Circumstances change, people change, so

what happens to happiness that is rooted in the ever-changing? People bring us joy only in that we see them as the Lord’s reward to us.

A third important principle about standing fast is that we should live reasonably. *Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand (v.5)*. Doctrine is non-negotiable. The clearly stated truths of the Bible determine our standard for living. Most sincere Christians agree what those truths are. Generally, you can find those non-negotiable truths stated in sound creeds and catechisms.

But much about the Christian life is preferential and negotiable. Our reasonableness is revealed in our willingness to associate with those who disagree with us. Our reasonableness is demonstrated in our ability to refrain from pushing or promoting our preferences on others. Our reasonableness is obvious when are able to “go as far as we can go on the right road” with someone who is different from us. The person who is always preaching about a debatable preference or pressuring others to accept their special interest is not reasonable. As you know from experience, the unreasonable person robs an assembly of peace.

Fourth, the Lord commands us to stop being anxious but pray. Paul wrote, *Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God (v.6)*. First, consider what is required in our not being anxious. The verb is a present tense imperative which means stop worrying, stop having anxiety. Notice that is not a recommendation but a command. Do Christians not prove their love for Christ by obeying His commands? Then, apparently it is possible for a Christian to stop having anxiety. God has provided us with His Word, His Spirit, and His gifted people in the assembly to bring about this change in worrisome people.

And another very important key to stop worrying is prayer. The instruction here tells us that prayer is applicable to everything. To pray is to talk to God with the full expectation that He will keep His promise to hear and answer as we speak in Jesus’ name. To pray is to present our requests, our desires. Sometimes as we present our requests, God allows us to present those desires for a long time (as the example of the widow with the unjust judge). Sometimes God tells us to stop asking (as with Paul’s request to remove the thorn). Sometimes God simply says, “No.” Most of the time, in typical

human fashion, we forget about the matter because it really wasn't all that important after all.

We dare not miss the reminder that to pray is also to express thanksgiving. A key characteristic of prayer is thankfulness. Too often we treat prayer like a divine ATM instead of recounting the incredible blessings God has already given.

So what happens if we stand firm by edifying others, by rejoicing, by living reasonably, and by praying? The result is peace. *And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus (v.7).* God not only promises peace, but it is a peace that exceeds human comprehension. That only stands to reason in that the peace of God comes from God and has God's characteristics. The more we know God, the more we experience His peace.

Again we must see the connection. We come to know God through the previous practices of standing firm, edifying others, rejoicing, living reasonably, and praying. In that process, we are learning to depend on the Lord more and more. As we depend on the Lord, we experience His peace that truly is unexplainable.

God has promised that peace will guard our hearts and minds. We are simply trusting what we have learned about Him in His Word. He responds by giving a "guarding" peace. His peace is our defense against the chaos of a sinful world and sinful flesh. The defense is set up for our minds and hearts. The result is that our thinking is guarded by peace, our emotions are guarded by peace, and our will is guarded by peace.

People with that kind of confidence come to the most unexplainable conclusions. Like Job who in the midst of incredible suffering said, *"Though he slay me, I will hope in him" (Job 13:15a).* Or like Thomas who I believe truly meant what he said when he told his fellow disciples, *"Let us also go, that we may die with him."* (John 11:16). Or what about Mary who upon hearing astonishing news about God's will concluded, *"Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38).* So how do we achieve this? How do we enjoy this promised peace? How can we stand firm, resolve conflicts, rejoice, and pray?

## **Right Thinking Fosters Peace (vv.8-9).**

Verse eight is one of the most practical exhortations toward right thinking in the Bible. *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 (v.8).*

From this statement we learn that some things are quite acceptable for Christians to ponder. This is a list of the characteristics God deems honorable. All of these traits draw a line between ideas, thoughts, activities, pursuits that are worthy of the Christian's time or that are unworthy. Unworthy issues must be avoided or ignored. And yet, it is the unworthy stuff that garners the attention of our culture, our world. What is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, and excellent is rejected out of hand as passe, old-fashioned, or intolerant.

Regardless of the sinful world's response, we are responsible to train our minds to stay focused on the acceptable things. Apparently, we are capable of thinking right. It is true that we create habits of thinking just as real as physical habits. Most of us were never taught how to discipline our minds and so we just thought about whatever came naturally. Yes, and that which comes naturally is out of the flesh. *Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these (Galatians 5:19-21a).*

God's plan is for us to get control of our minds, to discipline our thinking, to establish boundaries. Peter was so much like us in the way his thoughts ran off course. He was quite sure he always had the right answers. He was sure he understood how Jesus was supposed to establish the kingdom. He was sure he would stand and defend Jesus. He was surely wrong, because he was thinking wrongly. After Peter's actions of betrayal crushed him, after Jesus restored him, after he was filled with the Holy Spirit, Peter was able to warn us soundly about disciplining our minds. *Finally, all of you, have **unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind (1 Peter 3:8).** Therefore, **preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought***

*to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:13). The end of all things is at hand; therefore **be self-controlled and sober-minded** for the sake of your prayers (1 Peter 4:7). Be **sober-minded**; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour (1 Peter 5:8).*

Now the wonderful promise: right practice results in peace (v.9). Or we could put it like this, “Think right and enjoy peace.” *What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me – practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you (v.9).* This statement reminds us that the truth is obvious. We have learned it. We have heard the truth taught and preached. We have read the truth in the Bible. We have meditated on truth and learned many lessons about truth. But gaining greater knowledge alone does not guarantee peace.

We have not only heard the truth, but we have received it. The word translated “received” means to take to yourself as in receiving a gift, or taking over an office, or accepting payment. It is the desired response after hearing the truth. We make the truth our own possession.

And more than that, we have observed the truth practiced in others. We know how truth works because we have watched others live it out. We have observed how truth applied changes the lives of those who have received it. We ought to know people who experience this amazing peace of God and learn why and how they do.

Okay, then we should do what we know is right. It is not enough to know the principles of the Bible. Nor is it sufficient to know how those principles apply to life. It is not even enough to watch other Christians practice these truths. We need to practice them. We practice the truth because we believe it is God’s truth, and because we love God and trust Him. As we are learning to depend on Him, we simply practice what He teaches. We do not try to keep the Lord’s commands to make Him love us. He already loves us more than we are able to comprehend. We do right because we love Him.

The result will be God’s peace. In thinking right and practicing right, we learn that we do not have to be in control. Most Christians struggle with the desire to be in control more than we care to admit. The more we think we need to control our circumstances, other people, our children, our work situation, the less peace of God we

will experience. The people who experience that greatest peace ought to be the people who trust God the most deeply.

The peace of God that exceeds understanding is a by-product not a goal. Our focus is God our Heavenly Father and Savior. We love God supremely. We trust God implicitly. Because we love and trust Him, we practice what we read in His Word. We are able to practice what we read because we discipline our minds. While we are busy focusing our minds on our gracious God, He in turn gives peace that the world cannot possibly experience. If you lack peace in your heart today, what do you suppose is the problem?