

Philippians

A Heart Transformed by Christ

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Philippians 4:4-7

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Introduction:

Good morning, everyone, it is good to be with you all this morning. If you have a Bible with you, would you please open up to Philippians 4:4-7. The Apostle Paul often ends his letters with greetings, blessings, miscellaneous instructions, and encouragements. Today we are going to be looking at some of Paul's final encouragements to the Philippian Church. And these are encouragements that we desperately need to hear today.

We live in a world in the midst of a mental health crisis. Rates of depression and anxiety are skyrocketing, people are lost, confused, and hurting. And it is not just the World out there, this is affecting us to. Many of us are feeling the brokenness of the World we live in. We are not immune to the fears, troubles, and anxieties of life. And so, we need to hear what the Apostle Paul has to say to us hear in the end of his letter to the Philippians. We need to hear his encouragements and exhortations.

Now, the word exhortation isn't one that we use often in our day to day lives but it essentially means to make an urgent appeal or to urge strongly. So, what we are going to be seeing today is essentially a snapshot of how Paul thinks Christian's should carry themselves. It is his emphatic appeal to the Philippians to understand how Jesus Changes everything and to allow that to inform our perspective and our attitudes.

So, hear now the Word of the Lord, beginning at verse 4.

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:4-7 ESV

This is the Word of the Lord; thanks be to God.

As I mentioned, these 4 verses offer a brief summary of the Christian attitude and perspective on life. Paul is telling us that these are the ways that we should think, and we should carry ourselves accordingly.

However, before we look deeper into these things, I want to point out that this is not some self-help, pull yourself up by the bootstraps, be your best self kind of message. It is important that we realize that Paul wrote this letter to the CHURCH, to Christians. Look at who Paul addresses his letter to in chapter 1 verse 1. “Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons:”

He is writing to “all the saints IN CHRIST JESUS”

So, once again, this is not a message about how you can live your best life now, Paul is not telling us how to practice mindfulness and focus on the positive, he is not telling us how to better ourselves. HE IS TELLING US HOW JESUS CHRIST CHANGES EVERYTHING.

Every instruction that we are going to see, every encouragement, every exhortation, every urgent appeal, is rooted in and founded upon the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Paul is demonstrating how the gospel enables us to have a different mindset. He is opening our eyes to see the implications of the gospel on the rest of our lives.

You see the gospel is not merely a historical event. Yes, Jesus was born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, died on the cross for our sins, rose from the dead three days later, and ascended into heaven. These things happen, they are INTEGRAL to the gospel. But the gospel is more than just the facts of what happened. IT is also the life transforming POWER of these events. IT is the way our hearts are changed and transformed by God. It is the fact that we are given the ability by God's grace to see and enjoy God. I love this quote from John Piper in his book God is the Gospel.

The critical question for our generation—and for every generation— is this: If you could have heaven, with no sickness, and with all the friends you ever had on earth, and all the food you ever liked, and all the leisure activities you ever enjoyed, and all the natural beauties you ever saw, all the physical pleasures you ever tasted, and no human conflict or any natural disasters, could you be satisfied with heaven, if Christ were not there?
John Piper

The Gospel is so much more than the good news of our justification and redemption through Christ. It is the life changing power to enjoy Christ and the day-by-day transformation into his image.

So, in our text today we are going to see three key characteristics of a heart that is transformed by Christ.

A Heart Transformed by Christ

The first thing we see is that a heart that has been transformed by Christ is:

1. Joyful

This is clearly seen in verse 4 where Paul says,

“Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I will say, rejoice.” Philippians 4:4

This is not simply an encouragement to rejoice. This is a COMMAND to rejoice. Paul is instructing the saints to rejoice at all times. But notice what he grounds the rejoicing in.

Paul doesn't say rejoice in your circumstances, he doesn't say rejoice in your wealth, your success, your family. No, he says rejoice IN THE LORD.

And just to emphasize these instructions even further he repeats the command. Christians are clearly and emphatically commanded to rejoice in the Lord ALWAYS. Joy and rejoicing are the default position of the Christian heart.

Now I want to make sure you heard that correctly. Joy and rejoicing are the DEFAULT position of the Christian heart. When Paul is commanding us to rejoice here, he is not saying that we can never experience any other emotion other than pure joy. He is not saying that we are sinning when we feel negative emotions. There is an appropriate time for tears and sadness. Jesus wept at the passing of Lazarus even though he knew he would raise him from the dead.

The Bible clearly teaches that there is a time for everything Ecclesiastes 3:4 says “a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance.” It is okay to feel sad. It is okay to weep and to mourn. What is not okay is for that to be your default attitude. G. Walter Hansen helpfully reminds us of this:

“Written from prison to Christians who are suffering for their commitment to Christ, this command calls for the development of a cheerful attitude in every circumstance to be the dominant theme in the Christian life.” G. Walter Hansen ¹

¹G. Walter Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 287.

“a cheerful attitude in every circumstance to be the dominant theme in the Christian life.” Not the only theme mind you, but the dominant theme. The one that is most present, most experienced, and the one which is our default theme. Hansen goes on to add that Paul’s

“double emphasis on joy comes from his own experience of knowing the resurrection power of Christ and participation in his sufferings (3:10) in his Roman prison.” G. Walter Hansen ²

The Apostle Paul knew hardship and suffering. He was well acquainted with grief and loss. Yet here he is saying that our default position should be that of joy and cheerfulness. Joy and cheerfulness IN THE LORD. That’s the game changer right there. That is the reason this is at all possible.

This is the reason the Apostle James tells us to count it all joy when we meet various trials. It is why the Apostle Paul can say with such confidence that he counts all his suffering and hardship as not even worth comparing to the Glory that will be revealed to him.

Because of the LORD! Because of who he is! Because of his goodness, his steadfast love, his faithfulness, his mercy, his POWER. Paul declares in Romans 8 “Written from prison to Christians who are suffering for their commitment to Christ, this command calls for the development of a cheerful attitude in every circumstance to be the dominant theme in the Christian life.”

‘If God is for us, who can be against us?’ Romans 8:31b ESV

² G. Walter Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 288.

Did you hear that just now? If God is for you, and if you are in Christ then he most certainly is, then who can be against you? What on Earth can stand against?

My friends, the sovereign, all powerful, all loving, all good God of the universe is ON YOUR SIDE. What reason do you have to not rejoice? What can steal your joy?

Let me be honest with you for a moment. I think by and large we have dropped the ball in this area pretty badly. I think we should do some honest reflection. I would encourage you this afternoon or this week to ask those people closest to you if they would consider you to be a joyful person?

We ought to be known as people of JOY. People who have a resolute gladness about them.

We all can grow in this. We all can grow in our capacity for Joy, in our ability to see Christ for who he is. To see the goodness and Glory of God revealed to us through Jesus and to SAVOUR IT. To rest in it. To enjoy the freedom and power that is ours in Christ.

Freedom to look past petty grievances, frustrations, and inconveniences, freedom to feel the resounding joy that comes from knowing that God is good and that he is working all things for the good of those who love him.

Look to Christ my friends, look and look again and know the joy that is yours in Christ. Christ has redeemed you from your sins, he has freed you from the curse of death, he has purchased you by his blood, he has given you EVERY reason to rejoice. So Rejoice.

A heart that has been transformed by Christ is a heart that is joyful. That is the first thing we see in the text this morning.

The second thing we see is that a heart that is transformed by Christ is:

2. Gentle

Look in your Bibles with me to verse 5. There we read

“Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand;” Phillipians 4:5
ESV

Your Bibles may or may not have a footnote there, mine does, it likely says something along the lines of “or gentleness”. You see the Greek word used there, ἐπιεικὲς, doesn’t have a direct English translation. So there is some ambiguity towards what it means. Reasonableness captures some of the meaning. Gentleness captures other aspects.

I. Howard Marshall defines the word as

“fairmindedness, the attitude of a man who is charitable towards men’s faults and merciful in his judgment of their failings because he takes their whole situation into his reckoning”
I. Howard Marshall ²

Ralph Martin offers this helpful summary. Stating that

“Perhaps ‘graciousness’ is the best English equivalent; and, in the context here, it is to be the spirit of willingness to yield under trial which will show itself in a refusal to retaliate when attacked.” Ralph Martin ³

² Marshall, *The Challenge of NT Ethics*, pp. 305–308; cf. Barclay, *New Testament Words*, pp. 38, 39.

³ Ralph P. Martin, *Philippians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 11, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 174.

I think the idea is best captured here by the word gentleness. Christians ought to be gentle. They ought not to retaliate when attacked at Martin helpfully noted and as Jesus says in Matthew 5.

We must not be quarrelsome; we must not seek retaliation and revenge. This is a summary statement of what Paul said to the Church in Rome.

“Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. 16 Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. 17 Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. 18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. 19 Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it[i] to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” 20 To the contrary, “if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.” 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” (Romans 12:14-21 ESV)

That’s what Paul is capturing here in his instructions to the Philippians. But notice that once again Paul gives a foundation for this instruction. He reminds the Philippians that

“the Lord is at hand.” Phillipians 4:5b ESV

Now this phrase may mean that the Lord is at hand in the sense that the day of the Lord is near and God’s perfect justice will be enacted. Or it may refer to the sense that the Lord is at hand through the nearness of Jesus to us through the indwelling Holy Spirit. That God is with us in the Spirit and that nearness should allow us to overcome evil with good rather than seeking vengeance.

Personally, I think Paul is referring to both of those things when he reminds us that the Lord is at hand. He is telling us that the day of the Lord is coming soon and that when it comes, the wicked will be punished, and people of God will be united with God in heaven. Therefore, we can withstand a little unfair treatment now, we don’t need to retaliate, we don’t need to “get ours”

because we know that the Lord will repay and that his perfect justice is far superior to our imperfect justice.

On top of that, Paul is also reminding us that God is with us, He is reminding us that in the face of adversity, mistreatment, and hardship God is right there alongside us. Jesus knows what it is to be treated unfairly, to be persecuted and abused and he understands our pain. He is able to provide the comfort we need.

Remember, friends, the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and as they were unfairly thrown into the fiery furnace for the dedication to God, they were joined by a fourth person in the flames who spared them from any real harm. In the same way God is with us in our trials.

If we are in Christ then we can be confident that God will spare us from anything that can truly harm us. This does not mean that God will spare us from pain, suffering, or even death, but it means that he will preserve our souls and shepherd us into salvation through all the various fires of life.

Consider what Jesus says to his disciples in Matthew 10:28

“And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.” Matthew 10:28 ESV

We have no reason to fear what happens to our Earthly bodies. We ought to fear what happens to our souls for eternity and, if we are in Christ, then our souls are secure. We have eternal, unchanging, unassailable security in Christ.

And because of this, because of the eternal security that we have through Jesus Christ we ought to be gentle, we ought to be gracious, we ought to be forbearing. That change should be taking

place in your heart if you truly have been saved by God's grace through faith in Jesus. The realities of the Gospel are being made more and more clear to us and they ought to transform how we view the world.

And this is a heart transformation that we are going to need in the coming years. More and more the culture seems to be abandoning any sort of foundation whatsoever and as people become disillusioned with their self-worship, as they become unanchored from any solid foundation, our gentleness, our gracious in the face of adversity, our reasonableness will shine like a beacon to them.

It is not time to fight, it is not time to shout about our rights, It is not time to be angry and bitter towards the world. It is time to be gentle and gracious, to provide calm reassurance of Gospel truths to a broken and hurting World. It is time for our hearts to be transformed as we behold Christ and the life changing power of the gospel.

Thirdly, we see that a heart that is Transformed by Christ is:

3. Confident

In verses 6 and 7 we are told

“do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”
Phillipians 4:6-7 ESV

Once again, we see a hyperbolic command. Paul says do not be anxious *about anything*. Clearly Paul does not mean that we should never ever feel anxiety about something. There are times when it is good and proper to be anxious. It's probably a good thing to be anxious when you are

standing on the edge of a large cliff for example, that's your body trying to tell you to get away from the edge and be safe.

I have never been more anxious in my life than during Eleanor's Birth. The brief pause from when she was out and when she cried was the longest and scariest moment of my life. I don't think that that anxiety is sinful. I think it is a normal parental concern for the safety of your child.

That being said, what Paul is commanding us against here is letting anxiety dictate our lives. We can be people who feel anxiety at times, but we are not to be ANXIOUS PEOPLE. Do you see the distinction there?

I don't want to minimize the struggles of those with anxiety. I know that mental health struggles are real and difficult. I understand that pressure and I know that struggle. I think as a whole, however, our society has normalized anxiety. In our efforts to support and encourage those with mental health struggles our pendulum has swung too far to the other side and we have now made it seem that anxiety is just simply a fact of life. It is not something that can be treated or overcome, it is simply who people are. It has become a part of some people's identities and society is saying that is okay.

THAT is a problem. That is not what the Bible says. Paul says that our identity is not in our anxiety, it is in Christ. We are not to be defined by, nor controlled by our anxieties. Rather, we are to bring them to the Lord in Prayer.

The Bible consistently reminds us that we have a good Father in Heaven who A. wants to hear our prayers and concerns. And B. is faithful to answer them according to his perfect will. And so because of these things we can bring our prayers to God with CONFIDENCE.

Hebrews 4 concludes by saying

“Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” Hebrews 4:16 ESV

Friends, the sovereign God of the Universe, the three times Holy Lord of all creation who dwells in unapproachable light IS IN FACT APPROACHABLE through Jesus Christ. Jesus has given us direct access to our ALL-POWERFUL heavenly Father, to the one who has counted every hair on our heads.

What is there to stop you from drawing near to him? What is there to stop you from receiving the mercy and grace to help in time of need? What is there to stop you from receiving and experiencing the peace that transcends understanding?

THERE IS NOTHING!

Nothing in all creation can stop you from receiving what has been bought for you through the precious blood of Jesus Christ.

That is Paul’s promise here. That the peace that transcends understanding, peace when it makes no earthly sense whatsoever to have peace is promised to you IN CHRIST JESUS.

Christ has made a way for us to lay our anxieties and fears down at the Cross. This doesn’t mean that we won’t feel those anxieties ever again, but it does mean that they will no longer control us. I genuinely believe that is promised by God. I think the problem is that so often we bring our burdens, fears, and anxieties to God, yet we keep some back.

We are willing to lay down some of our sins, some of our fears, at the cross but not others. We are often afraid of what will happen if we let it all go. We have convinced ourselves for one

reason or another that we cannot FULLY trust God. We can trust him with a lot, but not with everything.

When I look back at my life, every major period of growth and development came after I realized there was something I was holding back from God. These things that we hold on to are major obstacles to us fully realizing all that we have in Christ.

Remember Jesus' words in John 16:33

“I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.” John 16:33 ESV

Jesus has purchased our eternal, unassailable, peace that surpasses all understanding. This is yours to receive through prayer and through faith.

Church history is full of the remarkable witness of Christians through the peace they possessed in the midst of extremely difficult situations. Since the beginning of the Church Christians have been recognizable in society because of the peace they possess. Because of the steadfast confidence they have in Jesus.

A heart that has been transformed by the gospel of Jesus Christ is a heart that is at peace. It is a heart that is confident because it knows that it brings its burdens before the Lord in prayer. It is a heart that knows nothing in heaven or on Earth can stop God's good purposes. It is a heart that rests in the love of our Heavenly Father who gives good gifts to his children.

And so, this morning we see that a heart that has truly encountered Christ, a heart that has repented of its sin and put its faith in Jesus is forever changed. We see that if we truly are in

Christ then our attitude, our demeanor, ought to reflect that. We should be people who are known for being joyful, gentle, and confident.

Of course, this doesn't mean that we don't have bad days, it simply means that our default attitude reflects who we are in Christ.

And if you are anything like me this morning, if you are seeing the many ways you need to grow in these areas, then I will encourage you to look again to Christ. None of these changes are possible on our own. We cannot lift ourselves up. We cannot improve ourselves. There is no simple change you can make to increase your joy, your gentleness, or your confidence. The only thing you can do is draw near to God.

Behold Christ, as the Apostle Paul says

“And we all, with unveiled faces, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.” 2 Corinthians 3:18 ESV

So, the invitation before you today is to come and behold Christ. Seek him in his word, both on your own and together as a Church. Seek to grow in your knowledge of him and his love for you. Grow in your ability to see him clearly and be transformed by him.

This is the invitation from Holy Scripture, and this is our encouragement that the Gospel offers this morning. Jesus says

“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” Matthew 11:28-29 ESV

Come to Jesus, find rest. Find Joy and Peace. Know that these things are freely yours through Jesus. Let's pray together.