

Sermon File # 947

Scripture Text: Philippians 4:1-9

Sermon Title: *The Peace of God*

Manuscript written and sermon preached by Roger Roberts

At International Baptist Church, Brussels, Belgium

On Sunday Morning 12 October 2008

**For additional information regarding this manuscript, contact
Roger.Roberts@ibcbrussels.org.**

All Rights Reserved.

The Peace of God

Introduction:

Open your Bibles to Philippians 4:1-9. As you may recall from last Sunday, my plan for this fall is to resume sermons from *The Book of Acts*. But as I studied the passage in Acts planned for today, I had no peace in my spirit. In light of the growing, nearly world-wide financial crisis that will probably directly or indirectly affect all of us, my thoughts turned to the Apostle Paul's *Letter to the Philippians*.

The amazing theme of Paul's *Letter to the Philippians* is joy; amazing because Paul is writing this letter of encouragement from his house arrest in Rome. While under guard and restriction in his own rented quarters, Paul writes about our occasions of and reasons for rejoicing in the Lord.

In this letter Paul has already alluded to the problem of dissension and the threat of schism in the fellowship of the church in Philippi. Now Paul gets specific with the two culprits in the church who seemed to be the focus of the controversy—women named Euodia and Syntyche. Miss "Success" and Miss "Lucky" were workers and probably leaders in the church, who had no small influence on the fellowship (Gordon Fee, in *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, says their given names show the aspirations of their parents). Yet they were at odds with each other and were polarizing the church. (Frank Thielman, *NIV Application Commentary: Philippians*, says these two women could have well been deacons or even elders in the church. In any case, they were definitely influential).

Paul speaks to them directly, saying they are to be at peace with one another and to live in the peace of God. Further, Paul says that the solution to their conflict, peace, is another occasion for rejoicing. In fact, in this section of the letter Paul most emphatically states the theme of his letter as a command:

“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!”

Martin Lloyd-Jones says of verses 6 and 7 in our text, “This is undoubtedly one of the noblest, greatest, and most comforting statements which is to be found anywhere in any extant literature” (Page 399, *The Life of Joy and Peace: an Exposition of Philippians*). Follow as I read about the peace of God.

Read Philippians 4:1-9.

We’re all aware of the financial crisis that began in the US and has spread across Europe and now into Asia. In the US, comparisons are being made to the period of the Great Depression that began in 1929 and led to an economic meltdown, causing the loss of personal savings and financial security and prosperity, all across the economic spectrum, from smallest savers to the biggest investors and institutions. Like many of you, our investments and pension funds appear to be greatly at risk. Yet, important as these financial matters are, there are many other factors that are even greater threats to personal peace and security. Take warfare, for instance. Much of the world is either engaged in war or lives under the threat of ethnic conflict and even genocide. And as members of the Body of Christ, we continue to pray for the millions of fellow believers who experience some degree of persecution and suffering for their faith in Jesus Christ. In light of these disturbing facts, once again we are faced with the seeming contradiction of the announcement on the eve of the birth of the Savior. The angels declared,

“Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests” (Luke 2:14).

Obviously Jesus’ birth and incarnation and even his atoning death and resurrection did not mean the guarantee of financial prosperity. Instead, Jesus taught us to depend on him for daily bread and to focus on his kingdom instead of being anxious about the material (e.g., Matthew 6). Nor did Jesus’ appearing bring an immediate end to political conflict and wars between nations. Jesus said that not everyone would embrace the peace his rule would bring, but in fact his kingdom would bring a sword of division between his followers and those under the kingdom of darkness (Matthew 10:34). Jesus himself said that up until the very end there would be wars and rumors of wars (Matthew 24:6-7). Jesus acknowledged that his disciples would have to carry a sword for self-defense (Luke 22:36).

The peace that the angels announced with the birth of Jesus is the peace Paul is calling for among the Philippian believers—between one another and within their

hearts. Paul admonishes the church to be at peace with one another, beginning with these two women who were at odds and out of sorts with each other. The viability and credibility of the church's witness to the watching world was at stake. The church needed to demonstrate before the watching world the love and unity that would set them apart as God's distinct people.

Another aspect of this peace is the peace that was supposed to rule in the hearts of God's people (Colossians 3:15). Paul addressed the anxiety that seemed to be seizing the hearts of many in the church. These believers were having to pay dearly for their faith in and obedience to Christ as Lord. Within the domain of a godless Roman Empire these believers were branded as outcasts and troublemakers. They were, no doubt, beginning to feel economic, social, moral, and spiritual pressure from a hostile, unbelieving world.

Paul says the same peace of God is the solution to both problems of congregational dissention and personal anxiety. Without the peace of God and with unbridled anxiety, the believers would lose control of their minds and hearts. They would suffer mental and emotional distress and perhaps even illness under the load of oppression. Also, if they reacted to outside pressures with the same weakness and inability to cope as their unbelieving neighbors, they would jeopardize their witness to them. Seeing believers collapse under anxiety and worry, their neighbors would say, "These believers are no better off than we are." Only as God's people experience his inner peace and peaceful relationships with one another are prepared to be messengers of peace in this strife-ridden, war-torn and anxiety-gripped world.

Paul is saying in our text that the solution to these problems is God's peace, and peace that comes to us, first of all, through...

➤ **Peace through arbitration (verses 2-5)**

We all are praying for peace to come to all places of war in our world which have long been torn by wars and the threat of war, such as Eastern Europe, Africa and the Middle East. For years, as one example, there have been failed efforts to bring peaceful arbitration between the nation of Israel and the Palestinians. We can only pray for a peaceful resolution to this seemingly insoluble conflict and for resolutions to conflicts and threats to peace worldwide.

In all of these cases, in all national and international conflicts, there must be arbitration before there can be peace. Arbitration is the work of an arbiter, that is, one appointed to settle differences between conflicting parties or nations (See *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*, "arbitration, arbiter"). In verses 2-5, Paul alludes to God's work of arbitration and our responsibility in the work of arbitration within the fellowship of the church.

Our text tells us we should rejoice in the fact that we, who were God's enemies, now have peace...

- *With God*

In Romans 5:1-8, Paul speaks about our peace with God that results from our having been justified through faith in Jesus. Paul says in our text that we have reason to rejoice in our peace with God and with one another. Our peace is a gift from God through Christ Jesus. We were alienated sinners and enemies of God, but through his death Jesus justified us through his blood. He made peace with us "through the blood of the cross" (Colossians 1:20). Jesus died in our place, satisfying the demands of God's judgment, experiencing divine wrath for sin. As un-forgiven sinners we are enemies of God. But God sent his Son to die in our place that he might remove that enemy and hostility caused by our sin and rebellion against God. And Jesus continues as our great High Priest, and forever is our advocate and mediator, bringing us to God (1 John 2:1-2; 1 Timothy 2:5; 1 Peter 3:18).

Because of that relationship we continue to enjoy peace with God. To confess our sins means we agree with God about our sins, and by daily confession and cleansing we continue to enjoy peace with God. Romans 5:1-8 tells us we have great occasion for rejoicing because we who were God's enemies, under condemnation, have now, because of the blood of the cross, been made God's friends, i.e., reconciled to him.

Here in our text Paul also closely connects peace with joy (as he also does in listing the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23). Paul mentions joy as a gift, an important aspect of the fruit of the Spirit, one of the graces of the Christian life. And joy is not to be confused with the lesser attribute of happiness, which is a state of mind largely dependent on one's circumstances. Joy is the gift of God which he also commands us to exercise. Thus, joy is not only a gift but also a spiritual discipline. "Rejoice in the Lord!" is a command, and God never commands what he does not enable. To have joy is our decision to obey God, and is the condition of well-being that comes into the believer's heart and mind upon trusting and obeying him. Joy is like "gusto," and closely connected with peace.

Peace is more than the absence of conflict. Nations can refrain from war, and yet be characterized by spiritual darkness and beset with social misery; so with individuals. Peace (Greek "eirene" and Hebrew "shalom") includes spiritual wholeness and health, and a sense of well-being that God's presence alone can give; and peace is much like joy. So, when Paul says "Rejoice in the Lord always," he is saying "Have peace with God always!"

Through God's work of reconciliation/arbitration we have peace with God but also...

- *With one another*

Because of that peace with God we now enjoy peaceful relationships with one another, and find that because of our new nature in Christ Jesus we have a desire and a commitment to love and forgive others. Because we have fellowship with God by agreeing with him regarding our sins, so we must come to an agreement with one another in order to have peaceful relationships. As the Prophet Amos asked, “Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so?” (3:2). Peace with God means Christ the Arbiter has dealt with our sins, and we agree with God we are sinners in need of his forgiveness. And our Mediator, Jesus, calls us to agree with one another and to be at peace with one another.

Likewise, Paul commanded Euodia and Syntyche to “agree with each other in the Lord.” These two leaders in the church were “in Christ,” therefore were under this obligation and should find it in their new nature to thus agree. In verse 5 the word “gentleness” is also translated “forbearance,” which is the opposite of the spirit of self-seeking. The English Standard Version accurately translates this word in verse 5 as “reasonableness,” what Matthew Arnold calls “sweet reasonableness” (Quoted by AT Robertson, page 459, Volume IV, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*). To be sweetly reasonable is to refrain from acting out of anger or with sinful, unreasonable retaliation, even when you have the power to do so. To be reasonable is to keep power under control, relinquishing personal rights and privileges, and to act graciously, redemptively and gently. *The Message* says in verses 4 and 5,

“Celebrate God all day, every day. I mean, *revel* in him! Make it as clear as you can to all you meet that you’re on their side, working with them and not against them. Help them see that the Master is about to arrive. He could show up at any minute!”

Having the mind of Christ that Paul describes in Philippians 2:1-11, the two believers at odds with one another should instead seek to meet each other’s needs. Euodia and Syntyche needed to act with this “sweet reasonableness,” letting go of their rights and power, and giving preference to one another. Not only so, but these two and all believers must move beyond the realm of personal concerns and become involved as peacemakers in the fellowship (Matthew 5:9).

In evangelical life we have developed an unbiblical individualism under the guise of being non-judgmental and not being nosy. We certainly are not to meddle in the personal affairs of others or be busybodies. Nor can we judge the motives of another’s heart. But we are called to admonish one another. Paul called to the attention of the entire Philippian church this problem between Euodia and Syntyche, and even appointed perhaps Luke, his loyal yokefellow, to be an arbiter in their dispute. (Some scholars understand the Greek word in verse 3

“Syzygus,” which means “yokefellow,” to be the proper name of the loyal church member whom Paul is asking to be the arbiter in the dispute between Euodia and Syntyche.) Likewise, we today cannot ignore the need for redemptive church discipline in arbitrating disputes and healing breaches in the fellowship of the church. We are commanded to initiate healing in the breaches of fellowship in the Body of Christ. As peacemakers, we will be given the title “Children of God” as we show our genuine love for one another and our longing for each other’s spiritual wellbeing (Matthew 5:9; 23-24; 18:15-20).

A Christian businessman and concert soloist from Springfield, Missouri, USA, Russell Newport, had a Down Syndrome son who died over twenty-four years ago. During the older childhood and teen years of his brief life, Timmy Newport was used of God as a unifier of the fellowship of the First Baptist Church of Springfield. According to his father, Timmy had an innate sense if there were people in the church at odds with one another. Timmy would take the hand of one a person involved in conflict, and then would lead that person to stand before his/her antagonist. He then would take the hand of one and place it in the hand of the other. “Now forgive each other,” Timmy would exclaim to the befuddled and disarmed adversaries.

Paul is urging perhaps Doctor Luke (verse 3), his loyal yokefellow, or Syzygus, to help these two women to get along. He wants these ladies to understand that a lot is at stake—the credibility of the witness of the church and the blessing of God on their fellowship. Paul urges this vital unity of the Body in Ephesians 4:1-16, saying it is essential for the Body of Christ to function in building up one another in faith as well as growing and serving in love.

Peace and unity in the Body are so important that those who threaten peace and unity are to be disciplined if they do not repent. Paul in Romans 12 indicates there are certain characters who are not possible to get along with (verse 18). He tells Titus that after a divisive person has been warned a second time, and continues to be divisive he is to be ignored and treated as an unbeliever (Titus 3:10). This is consistent with the steps of discipline Jesus gives the church in Matthew 18:15-17.

Paul is saying in our text that the two women fussing with each other used to serve side by side with Paul “in the cause of the gospel” (verse 3). Paul says they used to fight side by side with Paul against the real enemy, Satan. As FF Bruce says, Paul gave a striking tribute to these women, employing a strong athletic term, “synathlein,” meaning to strive alongside. Teammates must work together in order to lead their teams to become successful. Championship teams consist of unselfish players who have a greater regard for the good of the team than for their own recognition and personal success. Euodia and Syntyche had been great teammates and fellow soldiers of the cross. Now, he says, they have been hurting one another with their “friendly fire.”

Nations that experience the crisis of being attacked by an enemy, are suddenly unified in purpose and resolve to defend themselves against the common enemy. The church, and this church, must realize we are facing a common Enemy, and we need the love and support and fellowship of true believers who share a common life in Christ and commitment to him. We cannot afford to be divided or to wound each other with our “friendly fire.”

Again, *The Message* paraphrases verses 4 and 5, “Make it as clear as you can to all you meet that you’re on their side, working with them and not against them. Help them see that the Master is about to arrive. He could show up at any minute!” We are to live and relate in peace to one another in the awareness we could be called into the presence of Christ at any minute. Just as Timothy Newport surprised adversaries by leading them into one another’s presence, so Christ may surprise us by taking us home unexpectedly.

Nations that are under attack from determined enemies who stop at nothing to wreak havoc and destruction must be ever vigilant against future attacks from these who are devoted to their harm. We cannot afford not to be vigilant and prepared. Nor can we as God’s people afford to be unprepared against our enemy, Satan, who would divide and destroy us. And, we must be vigilant about the sudden coming of the Lord, as verse 5 reminds us.

John says we are to live and relate in such a way that when Jesus appears “we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming” (1 John 2:28).

Evidently it would be unsettling indeed for adversaries, saved by grace, to suddenly stand before the Savior who prayed and died for their unity (John 17:20-23; Colossians 1:20). Through the blood of the cross, Jesus made possible our peace with God and with one another. Peace is possible because of his work of arbitration. Jesus settled the dispute and bridged the chasm between us sinners and Holy God (Romans 5:1-8).

Our text tells us also that we enjoy the peace of God through...

➤ **Peace through enforcement (verses 6-7)**

God’s peace is ours through his enforcement. In verse 7 the Greek actually means God’s means God’s peace will guard your hearts and minds like a sentry. This is a military term meaning to post a watch or guard. When Paul used this term the Philippians would think of the Roman garrison or sentries walking the ramparts of the city as peace-enforcement officers. Nancy and I have enjoyed visiting castles and fortresses throughout Belgium and more recently in Ireland and Wales. What amazing defenses these were, with their tall ramparts and seemingly impregnable walls! And today, nations that have been under attack must take measures to guard their people from further attacks. This may mean

posting more guards and requiring greater security checks at airports and public buildings. Paul is saying that God sends out his peace to be on guard against anything that would disrupt our peace.

In Colossians 3:15, Paul uses another analogy for God's enforcement of our peace. He says, "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts..." The word "to rule" is like the ruling of an umpire in sports (see Williams' NT translation). Paul is saying that when anxious thoughts invade our minds we should let the peace of Christ say, like a US baseball umpire, "You're out!"

God's peace, says Paul, guards against our anxiety. "Do not be anxious about anything" must have seemed an impossible command to these Philippian believers, harassed on every hand. Paul in effect is saying that they should not allow their thoughts to be harassed or unsettled in such a way as to threaten their emotional and mental stability.

All of us know how anxiety that is out of control can rob us of calm and sleep, and yet how useless is such anxiety. This is what Jesus is saying in Matthew 6:25-34. He uses the "how much more argument to say, if the almighty, heavenly Father is able and willing to care for birds and flowers, how much more will he clothe and feed you? And in the same passage, Jesus speaks about the futility of worrying about tomorrow (Verse 34).

Dr. Walter Cavert surveyed and discovered that out of all thoughts that cause anxiety only 8% are matters of legitimate concern. The rest are imagined, things that never would happen, or are beyond one's control anyway (from Warren Wiersbe, *Be Joyful: Philippians*). The devil is a liar, and he would harass us with his lies and imagined fears.

Anxiety for the believer is sin because it is practical atheism—thinking and acting as though God were non-existent.

A lady in England during World War II was a marvel to her friends because she could always sleep through the bombing raids. When asked her secret she replied that the Scriptures tell us that God who watches over Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps (Psalm 121:4). "So why," she asked, "should both of us stay awake?" (As quoted in a sermon, "A Remedy for Worry," by Daniel Vestal).

The Sovereign Lord will enforce our peace like a guard...

- *Through prayer and petition*

The solution to anxiety is trust, which comes through prayer to the Lord who is always near, not just coming soon in his Parousia (verse 5). In our text Paul describes the aspects of true praying. The first word for prayer means "worship/praise." Before we list our requests before God we need to affirm who

God is. We must focus on his greatness. Such worshipful praying tempers our requests and makes us aware of his greatness and his power to answer and to meet any need.

Jesus taught us in the Model Prayer to begin with this note of praise:

“Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be your name” (Matthew 6:9).

Jesus was awakened from his slumber in the boat because his disciples were panic-stricken during the storm. Jesus rebuked them because of their fear, their thinking and reacting as though he were not with them all along. He then rebuked the winds and the storm and calmed the sea with a word. Afterward, the disciples worshiped him. They learned the connection between worship and trust, the antidote to fear (Mark 4:35-41).

In the same way, our Lord taught us to pray for our daily bread, but only after we have acknowledged that he is our Father in heaven, who is to hallowed and worshiped (Matthew 6:9).

God enforces our peace also...

- *Through prayer with thanksgiving*

Paul says that when we pray instead of worry we are to do so with thanksgiving. Gratitude has a way of refining our request we would make of the Lord. When we remember to be thankful, suddenly our selfish requests fade from view, particularly as we realize how much we've been blessed.

This financial crisis may mean some serious losses to us financially; but already most of us would be considered wealthy according to the living standards of most of the world, where eking out daily survival is the way of life. Perhaps as a result of this economic slowdown in the industrialized world, people will become less greedy and more concerned about sharing with those in need, such as those in the developing world. Maybe those of us in the church will begin to live more simply and begin to give to God what is his and to his people who have real needs.

Thus thanksgiving rebukes our ingratitude and also our unbelief. When we request with a grateful heart, we remember what God has done for us in the past. When we remember how he has blessed us, we are encouraged to trust that he will continue to bless us in the days and years ahead, meeting all our needs. As Paul reasons in his letter to the Romans, if God did not spare his own Son for our salvation, he will graciously give us all things needful for our good and his glory (Romans 8:32).

And God enforces our peace...

- *Through prayer with assurance*

The peace of God will surpass all understanding, is what Paul says in verse 7. We will find his peace is “hard to believe” in the most extreme experiences of our lives.

Martin Lloyd-Jones tells of Salvation Army General T. George Carpenter, whose teenage daughter died of typhoid fever. She was a brilliant girl and dedicated to a life of mission service. Upon the death of their daughter Gen. Carpenter remarked to his wife about a strange and curious calm. She replied, “I feel exactly the same way. This must be the peace of God,” she concluded. This peace amazed them and, says Lloyd-Jones, they almost chided themselves because of it (Page 411, *The Life of Joy and Peace*).

I too can join with General Carpenter in testifying of God’s amazing peace that comes during life’s darkest hour, when there seems to be no human or obvious or even conceivable solution to our dilemma. And, with Philip Yancey, I believe God gives his peace even when we are bewildered and “disappointed with God” (See *Disappointment with God: Three Questions No One Asks Aloud*, Zondervan, 1988).

The peace of God gives a joy and serenity and even sleep amidst the storms of life. Daniel (6:1-10), after his prayer, went to sleep in the den of lions while the king, whose outward circumstances seemed impervious to human threat, tossed and turned all night.

As Paul said in the verses about the need to be at peace with one another, “The Lord is near” (verse 5). The Lord is with us in the storms, and is with us to meet every need of ours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:19).

In his Sermon on the Mount Jesus told us how needless and futile is worrying about the future. Because God loves us perfectly, and is able to meet every need, we must trust him absolutely (Matthew 6:25-34). Jesus said as we seek his kingdom and righteousness he will meet every need of ours (Matthew 6:33). Worry and fretting have no place in the heart of a child of the King, and a servant of the One who has taken full responsibility for our sponsorship.

Another truth that I am learning is that God is at work to bring us into a deeper experience of his joy. This point was embedded into my awareness by Larry Crabb, in his book, *Shattered Dreams: God’s Unexpected Pathway to Joy*. God allows our dreams (including those tied to our financial wealth and security) to be shattered that we might turn our hearts to seek greater joy in the Lord, which is for our present and eternal blessedness.

Finally, we enjoy God's peace through our...

➤ **Peace through surrender (verses 8-9)**

Peace as absence of military conflict comes about through the victorious nation bringing the defeated nation to a position of surrender, and forcing the terms of surrender. For there to be war or conflict, one party has to be the aggressor against the other. If there is surrender, there is no more conflict. The key to peace with God is to surrender fully to him, and to peacefully accept his terms for us. And our hope is that at the consummation of the Kingdom, Satan will be bound, and all nations and individuals will be brought into submission to Christ's rule. Then there will be universal peace, when God's will shall be done perfectly on earth as it's being done now in heaven (Matthew 6:10).

Paul seems to be saying that the believer, who still has a sin-prone flesh and nature, would find the peace of God through the surrender of evil and by focusing on the good. Notice, that when there is arbitration and even enforcement, there is always the possibility that conflict will someday resurface. As the saying goes, "Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty." That's why in this fallen world, nations must spend valuable resources on a military and on national security, to continue enforcing peace. But should all warring nations finally surrender, there would be lasting peace, as there will be on the Day of the Lord. The Old Testament describes God's peaceful reign that is established after his enemies have been defeated and all bow before his sovereignty. Likewise for us, there will be no lasting peace in our hearts with arbitration and enforcement alone. There must be final and full surrender.

The peace of God comes with the price of surrender. And this peace is through the surrender, first of all...

- *Of the mind*

We must realize that the peace of our natural thought processes is futile and elusive. God alone can rule in our minds to give true peace.

Our minds must be surrendered to God in obedience. Paul, in Romans 12:2 speaks of a continual renewing of the mind that is part of our surrender of our bodies/being to him as an act of sacrifice. Because the mind is the control center of our lives, how crucial it is they are surrendered to God's thoughts!

God's peace gives us a higher understanding and focus for our thoughts. Paul says we are to focus our minds on higher things—those of greatest value. These thoughts can include thoughts of God's general revelation as part of his creation. The Christian can enjoy and should appreciate God's good gifts to us, such as this wonderful world and creation of natural beauty. The believer should also

focus his/her mind on the best in our culture, for example, in the world of the fine arts. In music, art, and literature we can often see a reflection of God's truth and beauty.

For us to have peace of mind, our thoughts are to be consistent with Christ himself. Jesus is the truth about God and about what we are to become. As we focus in worship on Jesus we are mindful of what God wants us to be. Jesus is perfect in love, holiness, justice, mercy, kindness, joy, peace, self-control, humility and righteousness.

The Scriptures are for us the focal point of our thoughts, since they tell us about Jesus and describe him to us. Verse 8 of our text is a great argument for the value of Scripture reading, memorization and meditation. We can have no higher thoughts than thoughts about Jesus.

And, the believer is able, by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, to take every thought captive to obey Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5), including obsessing about our financial situation and future. And those who are under the terrible addiction to pornography, for example, must find God's grace and strength to replace thoughts addicted to illicit sex with thoughts focused on Christ and the things of God. Our minds and thoughts cannot exist in a vacuum, but will be filled with either godly or ungodly thoughts. Surrender to Christ is the only way to have victory and peace of thought.

To have God's peace there must also be surrender...

- *Of the will*

To have victory in war, there must be the breaking of the will of the enemy. As God's former enemies, our wills must be surrendered to his.

Our minds must give birth to obedient actions that are pleasing to God. We have peace, our text is saying, as we surrender our thoughts and actions to the revealed will of God. God's will must become our will. This is the meaning of surrender to God. There is no lasting peace between warring nations, for example, until the will of the enemy is broken into surrender to the will of the victorious nation.

We must submit to the will of God for our lives as revealed in the word of God. This includes the moral law and the holiness of life Jesus taught and commanded. To enjoy peace means that whatever God teaches us about his ways, we conform and adjust our lives to him and his ways. As Henry Blackaby says in *The Ways of God*, we must conform our lives and thoughts and will to God's ways of sovereignty, love, holiness and truth.

Verse 9 says that God can also teach us his will and ways for our actions and behavior through the modeling of our mentors and teachers. In Philippians 3:17, Paul offered himself and others as “conditional examples.” Only as they followed the example of Christ were they fit to be worthy examples for others to follow (1 Corinthians 11:1; 1 Thessalonians 1:6). How I thank God for godly people who have helped shape my life as they modeled for me the authentic Christian life!

This exemplary action is not to be simply observed and discussed, but rather followed. It seems that a good therapy for unrest, personal worry and anxiety is the balanced life of prayer and worship and active living for and service to Christ. I believe that every child of God, including the invalid, can and must serve the Lord, even if it can be no more than prayer, which is the greatest work of all.

The joy that accompanies real peace with God is the enjoyment of God himself through prayer and worship, and a life of serving others that comes out of that love relationship. And also, freedom from financial worry comes through obedience. I know the news isn't good about our financial investments. The only truly safe investments that Nancy and I have made have been through our tithing our income to the church and our giving above the tithe gifts to the church, to other ministries and to those in need. When we obey God in faithful stewardship and through faith giving over and above the tithe, we have the assurance that God will meet our needs and also prove the surety of the law of the harvest (e.g. Luke 6:38). It seems when your life is caught up in serving the Lord you're walking with him, seeing his work around you, and you just assume God is going to take care of you.

This will seem like total nonsense to any of you who are not living according to the Kingdom of God, but I see these times of financial loss and uncertainty as a great time to remain faithful to giving God his 10% (of our gross income) to this local church (the storehouse mentioned in Malachi 3:10) and to give a significantly to our special roof project as well as other forthcoming opportunities to give.

Peace with God comes when we put into practice a life of worship and obedience. Peace with God results in our being God's peacemakers (Matthew 5:9). Peacemaking is being God's reconcilers both among God's people in the church and with those outside the Kingdom. The key to peace with one another is to die to selfish ambition and to our own rights and privileges and then to serve others, in the pattern of Christ Jesus (Philippians 2:5-11).

Micah prophesied that the Day of the Lord would bring final peace when warring peoples “will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore” (4:3). Likewise, as God's people, we need to reshape spears and bury our swords of conflict, and surrender ourselves to God's way and work of peace. We need to reshape tools of conflict that have brought division and hurt to our

fellow believers into instruments of peaceful and useful service that build and strengthen the Body of Christ.

Paul, in the first verse of our text, referred to the Philippians themselves as his joy and crown. What greater joy, other than our joy in Jesus himself, than the joy of leading others to be reconciled to God? As New Testament scholar, William Barclay said, "There is no joy in the world like bringing another soul to Jesus Christ" (page 87, *The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Ephesians: The Daily Study Bible Series*). Those Paul had led to Christ he called his "stephanos," his crown that he would be given on the Day of Christ Jesus (Verse 1 of our text and 1 Thessalonians 2:19). This joy of being God's eternal peacemaker is the perfect antidote to a life of worry and fear. Peacemakers are those who truly are seeking first God's kingdom and righteousness, and have every confidence that all things else we need will be added to us (Matthew 6:33).

- *To the God of peace, who is with us*

The life fully surrendered to God is the life at peace. It is my blessing to receive emails from friends who are serving Christ in some very difficult places. I am convinced, as I read these messages from friends who are serving in Muslim areas of the world and in even war zones, the only truly safe place is the will of God. Time and again I hear these faithful servants of God talk about the amazing peace and sense of security they have in Jesus, knowing he is with them. Actually, according to John 12:26, they are with him, joining him in his great work of service.

The closing sentence of our text (verse 9b) says we not only have the peace of God within us. We have the *God of peace* with us, which is better still (see FF Bruce's commentary on Philippians). We don't receive just an occasional dose of peace; we have within us permanently the *Source* of peace. And if we but practiced his presence with us we would have no room for fear or anxiety. When I was a little boy, I was never afraid when my daddy was with me. I thought he could whip anybody. We know God is able to completely protect and provide. He is with us. So why do we fear? We need to be still and know that the Lord is God, and that the Lord Almighty is with us (Psalm 46:10-11), and because he is with us, it is impossible that anything apart from his permission could happen to us. With his presence, there is peace and joy. As David said, "You will fill me with joy in your presence" (Psalm 16:11). Therefore, "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!"

Conclusion:

In these uncertain, troubled times, how important it is that we have the peace of God! How vital it is, not only for our peace of mind and ability to worship and serve, but also for our witness for Christ in these days of international anxiety!

The world needs to see how followers of Jesus trust him to meet every need, including the material and financial.

The cure for unrest and anxiety is a right relationship with God. Do you have peace with God through faith in Jesus? Have you turned from sin and trusted him as your Lord and Savior? As you do, you will receive peace with God, and no longer will you be his enemy. You will become his friend.

Now is the time to be reconciled with God and also to be at peace with one another. Examine yourself in your relationship with God and with his people, and commit to being restored to your brother and sister in Christ. And let Christ change your sword and spear of conflict into instruments of peace, for the good of his Body, the church.

As a believer in Jesus, perhaps you need to repent of practical atheism, of thinking and living and deciding as though God did not exist. Now during this time of economic uncertainty is the time for us to renew our trust in him. Now is the time for to establish disciplined thinking and praying and meditating on his word. We need to replace worry with constant worship.

This is also a good time for us, who have enjoyed God's material blessings and perhaps have become too attached to them, to repent of our selfishness and greed, and begin to give God his tithe to the church and to share with others in great need. Perhaps God is weaning us away from the material and toward living a God and other-centered life.

Questions for Personal reflection and/or group discussion:

1. Write your own definition for the word "peace." How is your definition different from or similar to the peace that Paul describes in our text?
2. What are some factors that seem to disrupt or rob you of your peace? Has the current financial crisis increased your anxiety?
3. From our text, what does Paul set forth as a remedy for peace with God? With others?
4. How is it possible to "rejoice in the Lord always," especially when our circumstances are difficult?

5. How is it possible to transform our worries into prayers of worship and petition (requests)?
6. Have you ever experienced God's peace during an extreme circumstance, such as tragedy or grief? Do you have assurance that when such circumstances arise God's peace will guard your heart and mind in Christ Jesus?
7. What do you think might be included within those things in verse 8 that Paul says we should think about? How should we go about, regularly and daily, thinking about these things?
8. Why is it necessary to live a life of obedience to God and his word in order to have peace with God?
9. What assurance do you have that the God of peace is with you (verse 9)?

All Rights Reserved.