

Paul's 3 Step Program.
Philippians 4:5

John 14:25-31

Psalm 55:16-23

Colossians 3:12-17 congregation

Song: It is well with my soul.

Last week we spent our time digging a little deeper into verse 4 here, talking about rejoicing in the Lord. This week I want to take a closer look at the following few verses as well and spend a little more time here before we continue on and wrap up the book of Philippians. There is a tendency I think to look at these verses singly and take a lesson from them directly, but we must not forget the context in which Paul is writing and we must use that context to fully understand what he is saying and why he is saying it here.

So Paul is instructing his readers how to deal with an issue that has arisen there in the church between 2 women who apparently have a disagreement. Instead of taking sides, he instructs both of them. He doesn't tell them to just stop disagreeing, but rather he points them to their mutual love of Christ as a way to resolve whatever this issue may be. So these verses here, 4-7 are not just some isolated thing that stand on their own, but rather it is instruction on how to avoid such contentions.

So in verse 4 when Paul says Rejoice in the Lord always, he isn't just imploring his readers to do so, he is also instructing these 2 women, and those who are involved in resolving this issue. And the same can be said for verse 5 here. "Let your gentleness be known to all men, the Lord is at hand." So what we see here, in instruction both in how we are to conduct ourselves in life, and during any contentions that we may be involved in. As I mentioned a few weeks ago, when we get caught up in such things we all have a tendency to become defensive, to meet the aggression with like aggression, or even match and exceed it. And while there maybe such a place that it is needed, that is something we need to be mindful of while having such debates among each other.

The Christian faith is a balancing act, between knowing when to be aggressive against false teaching such as Paul was, or when to be patient and lovingly instruct, and warn against such false teaching and understanding as also we see Paul do. So for the sake of our study today, and in the context of these verses Paul is not contending against false teachers, or people who are trying to cause harm to the church, but rather he is seeking reconciliation between 2 faithful members of that church who have a disagreement.

So first off, the interpretation of the word gentleness that we find here from what I was reading this week is actually considered to be one of the hardest Greek words to translate for it has had many different translations and understandings. The word is Epi-ai-Kei-a which I know I am probably butchering in pronunciation has been translated many different ways. Wycliffe translated it to be Patience, Tyndale translated to softness, it has also been translated as the Patient mind, modesty, forbearance, moderation, and sweet reasonableness. While I think honestly there isn't any issues with either of these, and within the context of instruction to find peace between these 2 people many of these translations would fit quite well.

So what we see here is the conduct of the christian should be that of gentleness, patience, moderation, and should be reasonable. All Christians should be known for their graciousness toward each other because it is God's grace working through us causing us to be so. This goes back once again to our previous studies, about putting oneself aside for the sake of the other. Having the ability to put aside our own wishes and desires for the benefit of another believer. Not only is this important in how we deal with each other, but it also is our witness to those outside who are watching. Often times when I think of Christians today I think can resemble the family that when they know people are watching may look like the perfect family who has everything together.

But when they think no one is watching everything changes and their true natures come out. Paul says here we are to be known by our gentleness, by our reasonableness, by our patience, and graciousness. Paul instructs the Corinthians in the same, that is better to be wronged by a brother, then to be contentious and fight for what you perceive as being right. Corinthians 6, verse 1. "Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints?" The problem that had arisen here in the Corinthian church went so far to the point that they were taking each other to court and relying on the secular government to resolve their issues. Verse 2. "Do you not know that that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters?" Keep in mind what we just said about the world watching. The world watches the church and the world is always the first ones who can easily point to the sins, and the flaws of those who are claiming Christ.

You preach about Christs forgiving love, yet you take each other to court for wrongs, or perceived wrongs against you? The gist of Paul's argument here to the Corinthians is that the saints will judge the world, and in verse 3 he says "Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life." His instruction here is that we who claim Christ, should have enough wisdom to resolved our own issues without having to bring the secular courts into our disputes. This goes back to our verse today...are you being known for your gentleness? For your forgiveness? He continues on , verse 4. "If then you have judgments concerning things pertaining to this life, do you appoint those who are least esteemed by the church to judge?" Once again, seeking resolution through the secular, worldly court system. Verse 5. "I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you, not even one, who will be able to judge between his brethren?"

Now here in verse 6, Paul goes into the problem with this, keeping in mind how Christians are to live, how to act because of the holy spirit working in them, he says. "but brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers!" Paul is disgusted in this sort of behavior, and is disappointed that there is not one person who would rise up to be a mediator between these people, verse 7. "Now therefore, it is already an utter failure for you that you go to law against one another." How is this an utter failure, what does Paul mean by this here? Well it is the complete opposite of what is supposed to define Christian conduct. Dragging a brother to court is not loving them as yourself as we are instructed, but rather is treating them as an enemy. It is not being humble, meek, gentle, gracious, which is how Paul says in our passage today we are to be known for. Not known for seeking justice, not known for making sure judgment is passed upon those deserving it, but gentleness, and graciousness.

Continuing on here in verse 7, he says. "Why do you not rather accept wrong? Why do you not rather let yourselves be cheated? No, you yourselves do wrong and cheat, and you do these things to your brethren! Our conduct is very important, and I think that is why so many pastors focus so much on how to live a christian life but in doing so puts so much emphasis on it that they can forget that it should not have to be mandated or forced because this is the way every Christian is supposed to be.

We would be amiss I think if we did not finish out with Paul's warning here to these in the Corinthian church who are dragging each other into the courts, who says are doing wrong, and cheating their brethren. Verse 9 "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived." I think this is key here to unlocking this whole thing, this is a warning, when Paul is saying do not be deceived I think it is talking about their own salvation. Do not think yourselves to be one of faith if you continue to act as one who is not. "Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, not adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, no extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God." In other words, check yourself, do not be deceived, do not continue down this path if you truly are a son of God.

It is better to be wronged, and it is better to be cheated and be faithful to God, then to seek judgment or justice in this world. This passage here in Corinthians stands as a polar opposite of what we see in the contention between to the 2 women in Philippians. Paul reminds them of their unity in Christ, to remember what truly matters. But here in Corinthians he warns them to not deceive themselves, do not think themselves Christians when their conduct is actually that of the world. And he reminds the faithful in verse 11. "And such were some of you, but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus by the Spirit of our God."

Salvation is life changing, and such were some of you. Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, homosexuals, thieves, covetous and drunkards. But we have been sanctified and washed in the blood of Christ, not to continue as such but to be holy and without blame. Washed, white as snow, forgiven, sanctified for the ministry of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And that brings us back to our verse here in Philippians...let your gentleness be known to all men, the Lord is at hand.

Notice also, he says that your gentleness should be known to all men. We all have friends and family members who it is easy to be this way with. To be kind, gracious, but we also have those who it can be very difficult to be kind and gracious to. Yet, we are called to do just that. All people should see us as gracious and kind, and that was the problem Paul had with the Corinthians in chapter 6. It is difficult to allow ourselves to be cheated, to be wronged, to be slandered. We want to dig in our heels, stand up for our rights, fight for what we think we deserve, but Paul says when it comes to the family of God we should allow such to happen for the sake of peace and unity between brothers and sisters. And I would take it even a step further, that it should be our conduct to all, not seeking our own but be mindful of the ministry and of the gospel witness that we have.

A good friend of ours had this very struggle. He had done some work for someone, who, long story short, was cheated out of \$1000s of dollars. After meeting with this person, explaining that he was not paid as agreed upon this person still refused to pay. So our friends response was not to drag this person to court even though he honestly had every right to do so, but rather with the ministry of Christ in mind, knowing the forgiveness that he was forgiven with he ultimately decided not to take this person to court. Allowing himself to be wronged, allowing himself to be cheated for the possibility of it being a witness of Christ to this individual. Sure, in all likelihood this person went on happy with themselves of how they got the job done and saved money, but we do not know how God can work, using even circumstances like this to bring conviction.

And that brings us to verse 6 here in Philippians. “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplications, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.” So once again thinking of Paul here and the circumstance he is under while writing this, he was awaiting trial which could ultimately lead to his execution, there were others who were seeking to add affliction to his imprisonment as he mentions in chapter 1. And also there is this contention that has arisen between 2 people that he obviously cares deeply for. Paul has every reason to be anxious, but he reminds us here that no matter what is happening around us we should not be anxious for anything, and not only as we said last week looking at verse 4 here, we should be rejoicing always.. not just when things are good, but also in rough times.

The Greek word that is translated anxious here is *marimnao*. Which means, to be pulled in many different directions. It is the idea that there are things going on which we feel we are being pulled by and we worry about being able to control what is happening around us. Or how all things various things will work out. There are so many things that can make us anxious, so many things for us to worry about in this life. So once again, we see Paul who has so many things pulling him in different directions, yet he does not worry, he does not become anxious which we saw in chapter 2 when he talks about his current condition. He was not concerned with dying, and in fact saw dying as gain. And while a part of him desired that death would come for he could then be free from the world and finally be in the presence of his savior, he still had hope for life, and desired to live not for his own sake but for that of others.

He understood that God had a plan for him, and he believed that his work here on earth was not yet complete so he trusted God that he would be delivered. Paul's tells us his secret how he combats anxiety, how he while even facing death can remain calm and not worry. He says, “but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving.” So to put it simply, he says don't worry about anything, and pray about everything. I think this everything here is important to mention. There is nothing to great, or to small for God. And often times those things that may seem like little problems, if left unchecked may become bigger problems. Coming to God in prayer about everything great or small has a profound effect on us.

It will help to focus our hearts and mind on God. Through prayer we are reminded as we pray who truly is in control. What anxiety truly is, is a wrong thinking about what is going on around us. Thinking or feeling like we have the power to control the events unfolding around us. We get caught up into thinking how we can influence and control these things that ultimately we have no control over, and we worry, and fret about the outcome. When we go to God in prayer and make our requests known as Paul says we should. We are coming to our sovereign Lord and we are making an appeal to him who is the only one with the power to do anything about our situation. Anxiety, and worry is a wrong thinking and emotion for it is not trusting that God is in control, and that God will take care of you.

Notice here though, that in Paul's instruction on how to deal with anxiety, he says everything in prayer and supplication with thanksgiving. Sometimes we tend to come to God in prayer with such a focus on ourselves and our needs that we neglect the praise and supplication part. Prayer is more than just us asking God to grant us what we desire, or deliverance from our problems. Prayer is a form of worship, we must not forget that part. Instead of acting like greedy children always looking for the next hand out, our main focus should be upon thanking our father for all that he has done for us. We should be spending time in prayer praising him, and worshipping him. The great side effect of the praise of God in prayer is again a refocusing of our hearts and minds away from our troubles and instead to worshipping the God who saves.

As one author said, “Adoration for God helps us to remember the greatness and majesty of God. We must remember that God is big enough to solve problems that we can not. Too often we rush into his presence and hastily tell him our needs but freedom from anxiety comes when we spend more time on who He is, rather than what our problems are.”

Coming to God in prayers of praise and worship helps to put our problems into perspective and ease the anxiety that we may feel welling up inside. For as we are doing so, we become reminded of all of the things that he has done, and is doing for us. Paul tells us in verse 7 here, that this kind of prayer, coming to God with everything, being focused upon him, seeking his will in all things with thanksgiving will have the effect of driving out all of our worries, all of our anxieties and as he says here, “and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

God may not always remove the problem. Look at the Thorn in the flesh that Paul suffered with, and prayed to be relieved from but God did not. This weakness that Paul had what ever it may have been was not a point of anxiety in Paul, he did not use it as an excuse, but rather he saw it as a constant reminder of where his strength comes from. And even here, he says even if this trial ends with his execution it is not something he is overly concerned about for he knows that he will be delivered from death, and resurrected to be with his Lord. Paul has complete trust in God, that what ever God wills for his life is the best possible thing that could happen to him, even facing death he rejoices.

It is this understanding, this faith, this belief and only through this God can we have such peace. God may not remove the problem, but he will give us the strength to endure, the grace to persevere, and the peace knowing that we are in his sovereign hand. Having this peace that surpasses all understanding is the very thing that guards our hearts and minds from anxiety and worry. Trusting God in all things, makes all things small in light of the creator and sovereign King of all.

So to sum it up, in these 3 verse's here we find the key to dealing with everything that life throws at us. No matter our circumstance, no matter our trial, no matter what is going on around us, Rejoice in the Lord always, for it is the Lord who delivers, it is the Lord who has bought and paid for you, he will not leave you or forsake you. If we are rejoicing in all things, it will change how we react to everything around us. We will be known as a people who are gentle, who are kind, compassionate, caring, and not given to outburst of anger and wrath. Who remain calm when the trials come, who are not anxious and worried about tomorrow for we are rejoicing in God today for all that he has done, and trusting in him to provide for tomorrow just as he has every day. This is how we deal with society, this is how we deal with the world around us, by faith in Christ, putting our trust in him, in all things be in prayer with thanksgiving. And it is God who will grant you that seemingly impossible peace that confounds the world. That peace that says, no matter what happens, it is well with my soul.