

## Paul's Letter to the Philippians 4.1 – 9

*Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends! <sup>2</sup>I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. <sup>3</sup>Yes, and I ask you, my true companion, help these women since they have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.*

*<sup>4</sup>Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: rejoice! <sup>5</sup>Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. <sup>6</sup>Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. <sup>7</sup>And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

*<sup>8</sup>Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things. <sup>9</sup>Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me – put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.*

Paul is near the end of his letter to the Philippians, which he wrote to 'the saints' in Philippi. Not famous people to be immortalized in stained glass windows, of course, but just ordinary Christian believers. In our passage we have some well-known verses which we love, but how are they connected? How do they relate to the rest of the letter? Or are they just random thoughts? Well, chapter 4 starts with a 'Therefore'. So what is it there for?



Let's look back at the end of Chapter 3. Paul has just contrasted two ways of living from 3:19. *For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. <sup>19</sup>Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things. <sup>20</sup>But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>21</sup>who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.*

Some live as enemies of the cross, living for the moment, for pleasure, with their minds set on earthly things, like money, fame, having a nice home, or being important in some way. Paul says 'their glory is in their shame.' They flaunt their wrong behaviour. As Paul wrote in Romans 1:32 *Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.*

Christians, 'saints', should be radically different. Our focus is on the future and on the Lord Jesus Christ, the one to whom the future belongs. So Chapter 4 goes straight on from that thought – so stand firm like that! Keep that focus on Jesus, anticipate His reign joyfully! And live appropriately.

Today is All Saints Day, when we turn our thoughts to those who have gone before us in the faith – a grand procession of followers of Jesus who, down the centuries, have kept the faith, trusting in Christ for forgiveness and new life. They are cheering as we journey on, and especially as we approach the end of our lives, faithful to our Lord.



So what does that appropriate life look like for those who follow Jesus?

Firstly, it looks like a loving family – *dear friends, brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for*, says Paul. I wonder if, like me, you have been loving and longing for your church family over the months when we could not meet – and perhaps you still do, if you are not yet able to come to church. On Oct 18<sup>th</sup> when we had the first service since March, I looked around with great joy and affection at all who were gathered in the building. And I thought with love and longing off those who were not able to be there. Paul has a special connection to the Philippian church and calls them his joy and crown!

Secondly, we are to be a reconciled family. Like any family, the church sometimes has its squabbles. Euodia and Syntyche (Odious and Soon-Touchy?) had fallen out. We don't know what happened. Perhaps it was a row about

I DON'T KNOW WHY HE LISTED ME FIRST, SINCE YOU'RE THE ONE WHO STARTED IT!

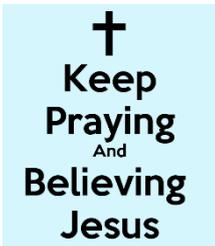


servicing coffee, or some other trivial issue. Perhaps their disagreement was more serious. Probably each of them thought there was a principle at stake, because that is often how it is when we fall out with someone. Perhaps both thought the other should apologise first. The church in Philippi started with women, as we read in Acts 16, and these two seem to have been key players. Their disagreement would be unsettling to the church, and, if people started taking sides, it might even threaten to cause a split.

Paul certainly thought seriously enough that he made an appeal to them in a public letter to the whole church. 'Be of the same mind' he writes. It just won't do to allow these squabbles to remain unresolved. The bitterness can spread and lead to disharmony in the church, and that will bring shame on the Lord and make them ineffective at sharing the Good News. Paul begs his 'true companion' or 'yokefellow' to help sort this out, because both women have worked with Paul in the Gospel. We don't know who the suggested peace-maker was; perhaps Paul means the pastor of the church. If you have two friends who have fallen out, do whatever you can to help them see each other's point of view. Notice that Paul is not questioning the genuineness of their faith. He knows their names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life! But even genuine believers sometimes struggle with relationships.

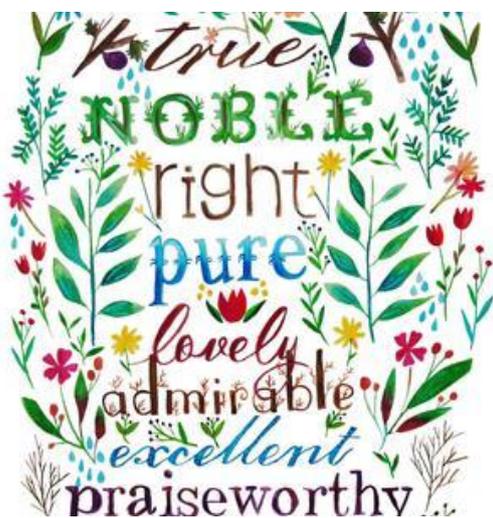
I have done my share of falling out with people in the past. I have learned, I hope, that it is more important to make peace than to win the argument, especially if the issue is not about the message we preach. Even if I'm right, I may have an unloving attitude which puts me in the wrong. Let's learn to be the first to apologise for whatever part we have played in the quarrel, however small. That is the part for which God holds me accountable. The other person is responsible for their part in it; it is not my job to make them aware of it! Often, a genuine apology for my part of the problem results in the other person apologising too. But even if not, God sees my own heart and I live to Him.

Thirdly, our Christian life is to look like 'Keep calm and carry on' – albeit with a twist. <sup>4</sup> *Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!* <sup>5</sup> *Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.* <sup>6</sup> *Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.* <sup>7</sup> *And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*



I wonder how you have come through these difficult months? Has your life been increasingly marked by joy and gentleness and a sense of God's presence? Have you found your anxiety soothed by prayer and determined thanksgiving? Have you known the peace of God guarding your heart and mind in Christ Jesus? We have privileged access to God's presence and He invites us to lean on Him. Let's carry on doing that more and more. Perhaps we should say 'Keep praying and carry on.'

Fourthly, this Christian life should look positive. Think about good things: this links to prayer and thanksgiving.



We must see the good in our lives and in each other. Let's refuse to dwell on the negatives. Let's avoid bemoaning the restrictions we are living under. Let's not feel sorry for ourselves! Let's stop wishing things were different and embrace what is good. The sun still shines, flowers still grow, we have food and shelter and so much more than we need. We have a dear Saviour and friend who is with us all the way.

So, as the people of God who are waiting for Jesus to return, what kind of life are we to live? We are to live as a loving family, a reconciled family, a family that keeps praying and celebrating all that is positive and enjoying God's peace. Today we also remember that we are a world-wide family with a long history! *Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends!*