

SERMON- Why Pray?

Κυριακή, 19 Μαρτίου 2023 3:28 μμ

A. Intro

Our passage today is Philippians 4:4-8. Before we read the passage, I would like to cover some key points and background. Note also that I will be repeating certain points multiple times as it is crucial that we hear and grasp them.

There are a number of key points that I will stress in our time together. These include: Rejoicing, Anxiousness, Prayer, Meditation and Peace.

1. Background

First, let's set the table. We want to set the context for our work before we get into the passage itself. I have a few points to make.

The epistle to the Philippians was written around AD 60-62 while Paul was imprisoned in Rome under the Praetorian Guard. While many of Paul's letters deal with very weighty issues ranging from doctrine to apostasy, this letter is one that shows Paul's shepherding heart.

It is a letter filled with joy and thanksgiving. Paul is happy that more people were hearing about Christ even if some who were doing so with impure motives. Paul was also writing about being content in any situation. For Paul, this was especially important in light of the fact that he was in prison. His desire was for the Philippians to be united in Christ with all joy.

Paul wanted the Philippians to become servants just as Jesus was. Jesus served in all humility without clinging to all his rights as the Son of God. The Philippians were well known for having a high view of themselves. This is certainly the reality of the church in America today. This tells us that this message is equally applicable and vital for us today.

The entire book of Philippians is really about the life of Joy in Christ. Recall that joy is a fruit of the Spirit.

Galatians 5:22-23

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is **love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control**; against such things there is no law.

In our passage of Philippians 4:4-8, even throughout the book of Philippians, you can see all of these fruit manifested as part of this teaching.

Paul is making joy key to understanding the thrust of his arguments in this epistle.

Let's note that joy is more a state of being than an emotion. There is an emotional aspect to it, but this state of being permeates to our very core. While it is a choice to be joyful, it is also enhanced

and grows through the work of the Holy Spirit along with our actions through the process we review here.

The book of Philippians is fairly short and very tightly written in terms of scope and content.

A simple outline for the book of Philippians:

Chap. 1- Joy in Living for Christ

Chap. 2- Joy in Serving Christ in Unity

Chap. 3- Joy in Knowing Christ

Chap. 4- Joy in Resting in Christ

We hear Paul's instruction in this letter to all the saints in Christ who are in Philippi including the overseers (elders) and deacons. So much in this book is about imperatives or commands and exhortation that was very important when originally written, and as the word of God, speaks to us as well.

This book is a love letter encouraging and exhorting believers to stand firm in the Christian life. In our passage for we see Paul exhort us to rejoice, not be anxious, but to pray, enjoy His peace, and to meditate on pure things.

An exhortation is the act of earnestly supporting or encouraging a response or action. Clearly, this is what Paul is doing in this passage.

B. Scriptural Reading (Phil 4:4-8).

Now that we've taken a bit of time to set the background let's return to our focus and the passage of Phil. 4:4-8. Let's recall that our focus is on 'Why Pray?' We will have the answer when we finish our time together.

This passage is essentially commands and exhortation provided for our benefit. Notice that joy is central to the first three chapters in the book of Philippians. Paul then covers how we can come to joyfully rest in Christ.

What follows is a process that can be followed by the believer to obtain the peace of God which will guard their hearts and minds. This process follows known steps but we will look at a few points very closely to understand the impact at a deeper level.

Let's now read the passage:

4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.

5 Let your reasonableness be known to everyone.

The Lord is at hand; 6 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.

8 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.

There is much deep theology contained in this passage. Please continue to reflect on it as we begin.

We will review each of the key words/phrases in this passage. Our purpose is to hear and apply what Paul is telling us with respect to us obtaining the peace of God. We will understand what we do with the Spirit to achieve this peace.

1. Rejoice in the Lord always (V. 4)

The first verse in view is Paul's continuing focus on joy and it's manifested expression by exhorting us to rejoice.

4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.

The first 3 chapters of the book of Philippians demonstrates that we have much to be joyful about. The word is repeated twice for impact and emphasis.

As mentioned, Rejoice is an imperative that is a state of happiness and well-being. We are called to be glad. The idea is that this is a state that permeates us and is ongoing. It is the acting expression gained from Joy. We also need to choose to be joyful.

While it is most certainly a choice to rejoice, we are filled with joy more and more as we learn about and obey our God. As we continue we will see what helps to drive the increase in our joy.

2. Reasonableness (V. 5)

This first part of verse 5 is often glossed over. After being commanded to rejoice, we are instructed to ensure our reasonableness is known to everyone. This is very important in establishing ourselves with other believers in fellowship. Some think this verse seems out of place but on further study its placement here is amazing to consider.

5 Let your reasonableness be known to everyone.

Reasonableness here is defined as gentle, yielding, kind, courteous, tolerant, merciful, not insisting on every right of letter of law or custom. We seek to endure all things properly. The idea is that this is not a momentary action but one that reflects your temperament at all times.

One cannot pose as reasonable except for short periods of time or some situations. It is very difficult to maintain this reasonableness as an inherent part of your daily behavior if it doesn't well up from your very soul. It is an ongoing and growing part of the personality/temperament of the individual. It can be seen as showing grace to all and in all.

When its real this reasonableness permeates our entire being. While it may be sporadic at first as we grow, the mature Christian will be known by this in all that they do. Of course this does not mean that they are perfect.

It's important to see that reasonableness is right after rejoice and that it is to be known by everyone. This is instructive behaviorally in helping us temper ourselves. Rejoice but humbly

under control. Out of control emotionalism is not an example of reasonableness.

This reasonableness is manifested in true humility. While we rejoice we do so in humility as we understand who we are before a Holy God.

Thinking of others better than ourselves and having a proper appreciation of who God truly is drives a sincere humility. This humble understanding of ourselves enhances our reasonableness.

The importance of reasonableness in maintaining unity is essential. This provides the means by which varying personalities, educational, family and cultural differences can be shaped into a unified congregation. A joyful humility is in view. This should be enough motivation for each one of us to pursue joyful humility.

These first two parts of the passage, rejoicing and reasonableness, prepare the believer to be in the proper frame of mind for what comes next in the process.

3. Do not be anxious (V.6)

This next verse is among my favorite and really demonstrates that God is our caring Father. The first part of this sentence is often missed because it is part of verse 5. The impact of these few words are clearly connected to the first portion of verse 6.

**The Lord is at hand;
6 do not be anxious about anything,**

This is a beautiful picture that shows us as part of the same sentence, the Lord is 'at hand' to help with our anxiousness. The phrase 'at hand' is used in two ways in the Scriptures- for the judgment of people or to help His people. In this case it is used to show that the Lord is nearby as promised to aid us because He cares for us.

He is telling us to not worry or be concerned about anything. We are to cast all our cares on Him.

As we pray and meditate we will learn more and more about God's sovereignty and providence and how He is trustworthy in all things. This along with the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit strengthening us and reducing our anxiousness. Even those lacking in faith will have their faith strengthened in the same manner.

One only has to think of an example of a child that has to jump into a Father or Mother's arms over some distance. He is scared and want to believe his parents will catch him. The child naturally doubts. When the child does make the leap and is caught how joyful and happy he is! The Father is at hand for us.

Just as the child trusts his parent we can trust the father. We need to learn to let go and take the leap.

God calls you to obey but He does so as a loving Father that knows what is best for His child. He also knows the priceless benefit and blessing you will obtain if you do.

The following passages call us to not being anxious about anything. He calls us to faith and trust.

Luke 12:22-31

22 And he said to his disciples, "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on. 23 For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. 24 Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! 25 And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? 26 If then you are not able to do as small a thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest? 27 Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 28 But if God so clothes the grass, which is alive in the field today, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith! 29 And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried. 30 For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them. 31 Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you.

Our Master is calling us to trust and faith. Worry and anxiousness diminishes us. It prevents us from reaping the benefits that God provides in being near at hand. Anxiousness shows a lack of trust and faith in the sovereign God who says He will guard us. This process will work to overcome this doubt.

1 Peter 5:6-7

6 Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, 7 casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you

Here we again see the hand of God and casting your anxieties on him. As we discussed, if you see yourselves rightly before God, you will be humbled. You cannot see God as he truly is and not view yourself properly.

So we have looked at the first three parts of this passage: rejoicing, reasonableness, and not being anxious because the Lord is at hand. Now we will look at the next important aspect in prayer.

4. Prayer /Supplication/Thanksgiving (V.6)

This verse focuses on the key aspect of praying.

but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

A prayer is a petition. It is a formal request made to the one deity, in this case to the one true God. True prayer for the Christian can only be offered to God the Father, and Jesus the son through the Holy Spirit. Other prayers offered to other idols are of no benefit.

Supplication is a humble request for mercy or help. Supplication is part of a prayer. This encompasses the actual request like praying for a child's salvation.

Thanksgiving is showing gratitude and appreciation. Thanksgiving here is to be viewed as reactive and proactive. So we are very comfortable giving thanks for those prayers granted in the past. We can also give thanks for those that haven't been answered as yet. This is not presumptuous.

Giving thanks for prayers that have not yet been answered is based on trusting that God will answer all of our prayers. We can be thankful for that even if the answer is no. Thanksgiving will encompass all of our prayers.

The key point to remember is that we are to pray according to His will. In doing so we're thankful that our sovereign all-knowing God will answer our prayers in the best possible way for us. Even if we don't necessarily have that view.

The most familiar acronym used to help people pray is ACTS- Adoration/ Confession/ Thanksgiving/ Supplication.

- Adoring and praising our God reminds us who He is and who we are.
- Confessing our sins and repenting is necessary to purify ourselves in communing with God.
- Giving thanksgiving for all that God has done and will do.
- Offering supplication, or our requests, to God once kneeling before him as His humble servants.

All these elements should be present in every prayer but the process doesn't have to be rigorous. The order can vary. The important point is to work to have all elements present. By doing them in order, one is properly positioned to offer supplications to the Lord.

Prayer is critical to the Christian life. It is how we commune with God and the means by which the Spirit manifests in us. It fans the flames of the Spirit as it grows in all areas of our Christian life.

In the next passage we recall the full armor of God. The armor is what each believer has as a child of God to stand against Satan. Prayer supports and wraps around the full armor of God.

Ephesians 6:13-18

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. 11 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. 12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. 13 Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. 14 Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, 15 and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. 16 In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; 17 and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, 18 praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints,

This verse provides strong support for the importance of prayer as well as addressing two other key elements that are essential in faith and the Word.

Taking up the full armor provides support in our prayer process. The armor shows how each of these key elements are the tools for our success against the evil one. The belt of truth, breastplate of righteousness, shoes as the gospel of peace, shield of faith, helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit- the Word of God. These give a visual perspective on what this process will encompass and prepare you as a warrior for Christ.

Christ calls us to be warriors. Prayer warriors. These warriors for Christ must be anchored to Christ. They must abide. The whole armor of God is for all of His children. A zealous prayer warrior can accomplish much for the Lord, the church and individual believers.

Now that we understand that Paul sets prayer as the key aspect of this process we can focus on the benefit that is given to us.

5. Peace & Guard (V. 7)

We all want true peace.

7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

The peace of God is not as the world gives.

This perfect peace comes as we trust in Him. Scripture confirms this fact.

Isa. 26:3

3 You keep him in perfect peace
whose mind is stayed on you,
because he trusts in you.

Notice how we are told that because we trust Him, our mind is stayed on Him, and He keeps us in perfect peace.

Col. 3:15

15 And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful.

Here we see this peace ruling in our hearts and unified in one body.

John 14:27

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.

Since we have the Lord's peace, our hearts should not be troubled or afraid.

As we grow this peace will grow in you because you are growing in the knowledge and trust of our sovereign Lord. You will see a growing control and reduction in your anxiousness.

This peace keeps watch over and guards against the work of the evil one. This is all part of God's work in us and is vital to the process of sanctification, our growing in Christlikeness through our time on this earth.

In understanding the peace of God we turn to the final verse which shows how meditation works to transform the mind and further enhances the peace of God.

6. Meditation (V. 8)

This verse and the application is truly a transformational step in the process.

8 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.

The key word in this verse is the word THINK. John Calvin indicates the use of the word here is meditation. We are to ponder over the true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, praiseworthy. We are to reckon, consider and reason over these things. The depth of this meditation is deep, it reaches the level of sighing or moaning.

We are to use our minds to actively form connected ideas about the content we are meditating upon. The example that I ran across the most in studying was to think of meditating as chewing the cud like a cow. Turning the truth over and over in our minds so our minds can make those connections with the illumination of the Holy Spirit.

As we think or meditate on all proper things we will be transformed in our thoughts. In doing this we will develop a Christian thought life. A Christian thought life that is built on the pure truth of God's word. As we fill our minds with thoughts of God, we will push out sinful thoughts.

In this next verse we see why we take every thought captive and what why it's needed.

2 Cor. 10:4-5

4 For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. 5 We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ,

We will see our desires changing as we keep our minds engaged on pure things and not the drivel of the world. We must master our thoughts through the Spirit and remove those things that seek to divert, distract and take us from our Lord. The peace of God will help us succeed In bringing all our thoughts captive.

The focus of our meditation is to be on what is true. The truth in view here is the Word of God. Of course we can add other pure elements like godly books, movies, discussions, teaching, etc. The point is we should raise the bar to God's standard on what we put before our eyes and ears.

In the verses below we can see the importance of meditation and filling our hearts and minds with the Word of God.

Joshua 1:8

7 Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have

good success wherever you go. 8 This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. 9 Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.”

Since we are no longer under condemnation by the law, we are to obey and meditate day and night out of love, not out of a legalistic requirement. This is the essence of the tension between Law and Gospel for the Christian in the New Covenant.

Again, we see the delight of the blessed man.

Psalm 1:1-2

1 Blessed is the man
who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
nor stands in the way of sinners,
nor sits in the seat of scoffers;
2 but his delight is in the law of the LORD,
and on his law he meditates day and night.

The word meditates in Hebrew means to murmur, mutter, growl. Think of Orthodox Jews doing their daily prayers. I remember this in Israel at the Western Wall. The Orthodox Jews rocking back and forth saying prayer, with the Law on their foreheads, wrists and their prayer books. Murmuring their prayers and totally engaged in chewing the cud of the Law.

We're to engage with the law and all of the Scriptures and turn it over in our minds at a deep level. The law and all of Scripture is for us to know right from wrong according to how God has defined it.

Psalm 19:14

14 Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
be acceptable in your sight,
O LORD, my rock and my redeemer

The word meditation in Hebrew means the focus of my meditation. We are focusing our meditation on that which the Lord finds acceptable.

Now a word about the Law and Gospel.

This can be a blocker for some Christians who don't have a proper view of the Law (Old Covenant) and Gospel (New Covenant). Many say we are not under the law and so the law is no longer relevant for the Christian. Some are now saying we do not need the Old Testament or even the moral law because it is the old covenant does not apply to us. This is utterly wrong. The law was provided as a mirror for us to see how sinful we truly are.

So learning all of God's law and to be obedient out of love is the right response to the peace of God.

This practice of meditation along with prayer, and the work of the Holy Spirit will work to transform our hearts and minds as we become more like Christ.

The practice of meditation is more than reading and believing the Bible. It is absorbing all aspects and applying it to every area of your life each and every day.

The process of meditation includes the memorization, reading, and study of Scripture to be followed by the turning of those truths over in your mind to such an extent that you thoroughly digest what you have read, captured and memorized so that you are able to apply it to all areas of your life. Meditation then transforms into a constant state of prayer as you consider the truths of God and imbibe them into your very heart and mind. You cannot help but pray and praise God at this point. Engaging in this prayer and meditative process is then what is meant by never ceasing to pray. In doing this we maintain that deep level of communion and praise with God.

Meditation comes first then action. ~ John Calvin.

What we take in by the Word we digest by meditation and let out by prayer. ~ Thomas Manton.

Read it to get the facts, study it to get the meaning, meditate on it to get the benefit. ~ John Owen.

Meditation begins to overtake your thoughts and actions that are not focused on truth. This is the essence of taking our thoughts captive and working to transform our minds according to Word of God. Unlike Eastern meditation which strives to empty the mind and allow all manner of sin to fill the void. Biblical meditation seeks to fill the mind with all things God. The Reformers and Puritans were experts in meditation. While this practice has existed in various forms, most deeply during the time of the Puritans, it is rarely practiced today due to all the distractions, narcissism and competing idols that exist.

So as we think on these true things, with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the Peace of God grows in us and guards our hearts and minds. This results in greater understanding and trust of who God is and how he cares for us which will work to reduce our anxiousness and dependence upon God.

C. Why Pray?

These exhortive imperative commands in Philippians 4:4-8 are given in love for our benefit and provides the means of communing with God and shows us the way to grow more intimate with Him.

1. Application

So with all our study of God's Word, we must consider how to apply and then get to work!

The Spirit is faithful to work with and in us as part of our sanctification.

a. So what are we to apply?

1- We are to always Rejoice in the Lord.

- 2- We are to be reasonable with everyone.
- 3- We are to understand that the Lord is at hand, to help us.
- 4- We are to accept that with the Lord at hand, we are to not be anxious about anything.
- 5- We are to offer all our requests by prayer, supplication and thanksgiving to God.
- 6- We are to believe and trust that the peace of God will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.
- 7- We are to meditate on whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, praiseworthy. This is the Word of God.

I sometimes think that the very essence of the whole Christian position and the secret of a successful spiritual life is just to realize two things: I must have complete, absolute confidence in God and no confidence in myself. ~ Martyn Lloyd-Jones.

We begin our life in Christ in prayer when we pray for salvation through him in repentance.

Our pilgrimage here on earth must be bathed in prayer and meditation, daily, and moment by moment, to grow in Christ through the Holy Spirit as he cleanses us from iniquity, illumines the Word of God for and in us. This is essential for us to war against the evil one and be the living example of Christ to other believers and those who are lost.

As we iterate through Prayer, Meditation and Scripture with the illumination and guidance of the Holy Spirit we will find that our trust, joy, and praise will increase as we grow in faith. Our Christian minds will grow in maturity and displace other thoughts that are the seeds of our sin and doubt.

As you engage in consistent ongoing prayer and meditation we see the results in an increase in our reasonableness and a decrease in our anxiousness as the peace of God grows in us and guards our hearts and minds.

So the end is that in zealous prayer and meditation based on love, we will grow more and more intimate with our God as the peace of God guards our hearts and minds and enables our transformation to be more like Christ.

D. Conclusion

A man or woman of God who sincerely and humbly practices prayer will remain and abide in Christ and grow in Christlikeness throughout their pilgrimage on earth.

Grow in Christ through sanctification communing with God while abiding with Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Prayer, in many ways, is the supreme expression of our faith in God. ~ Martyn Lloyd-Jones.

Prayer is the cord that binds the entire truly converted Christians life:

- From the first prayer calling out to God in sincere repentance
- Through the relational, sanctifying prayer and supplication that is to be a part of our every breath through the rest of our lives
- To that final prayer as we pass from this world to eternity by committing our soul to God.

Rejoice! Be reasonable. The Lord is at hand, do not be anxious about anything. Pray and meditate on all truth in the Word and the peace of God will guard your hearts and minds.

If you do not have this assurance and blessing because you are not a believer in Christ, I urge you to consider the gospel message of Christ as your savior. Please seek the Father while He may still be found. Please reach out and talk to myself or others here about this most precious gift. Salvation in Christ is the only path to heaven.

There is nothing more amazing or important to discuss. Your eternity depends on it!

We have the blessed privilege of communing with the Creator of the Universe. Come to Him through Christ, reorder your life out of duty, out of respect, out of love. Know your God, follow your God, obey your God out of gratitude, thankfulness and love.