



Speaker:
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The Peace of God in Us

◀ Series: Philippians • 12 of 12

9/21/2022 (WED) | Bible: **Philippians 4:2-7**

The peace of God is primarily a description of who he is. He is a God *of* peace. He is many things, but he is also peace.

And our reading tells us we can experience something of the peace of God in ourselves. When I say “we” can have it, I mean God’s people. The peace of God is a gift to those who he has saved from sin.

Sometimes, well-meaning Christians take promises in the Bible which are meant for God’s people and apply them to the people of this world. I just read a book about counselling people from a Biblical perspective. The author suggests that all the blessings God bestows on his people are just as much for everyone in this world.

A Christian might read something about the friendship of Jesus and tell an unbeliever that Jesus is their constant friend. No he isn’t! They are his **enemies**.

Someone might tell a non-Christian friend that God wants them to be free of all anxiety. No he doesn’t! They should be anxious because of their sin, and this sorrow over sin is something they must experience if they are to get forgiveness.

The peace I’m speaking about today is ours alone. The Dalai Llama and John Lennon are just two examples of people speaking much about peace and who, at times, have or had a visible measure of peace.

But the peace spoken about here is that which can only be experienced through a relationship with Christ Jesus the Lord. It’s a peace which cannot be enjoyed by the people of this world.

My intention today is to focus on verses six and seven. I’d like us to think about prayer as the means by which we receive this peace, then think of the greatness of the peace of God which he shares with us, and finally see how this peace can dispel anxiety.

This peace comes through prayer

God gives us lots of things. Blessings. And he often gives us what we need even though we haven’t asked for it.

Yet his delight is to give in response to our requests. And we make our requests through prayer.

1 Peter 5:7—casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.

He wants to hear from you, and that's because he genuinely cares for you.

And Paul reminds us that the blessing of peace in our soul is a natural result of a proper prayer life. Verse six: "...in everything by prayer and supplication—with thanksgiving—let your requests be known to God."

Prayer was certainly needed in the situation at Philippi. Paul had become aware of a rift between two of the ladies in the congregation (v2). It's hardly uncommon. No local church of Jesus Christ has ever existed in which there was no trouble among the believers.

It could be because we're very different people. The way we do things might annoy someone else. We might say something without any malice at all, and the other person will take offence.

But we mustn't think it's always the case that both parties are equally to blame. Yes, I can be more careful in how I speak and behave, and you can make yourself less ready to take offence. But if a disagreement is caused because of some clearly sinful behaviour in one party, that's a matter for church discipline of some kind.

Paul's understanding of this situation in Philippi is it's not serious enough for these two to fall out over. Like us, they've been given a limited amount of time in life to serve God. So to waste time bickering and harbouring bitterness is to grieve God. This pair had worked alongside Paul for the sake of the gospel. They had far more in common than they appreciated. Above all else, he assures them their names are in the Book of Life.

We should try to apply it to our own experience in this church. If that other person is a believer, then their name is in the Book of Life, perhaps appearing next to your name. And in the world to come, both of you will be so utterly sinless, you'll genuinely love each other. If that's going to be your future together, it makes sense to do all you can to get along with each other now.

I'm interested in how Paul describes prayer in v6. I see four components there, and some of these ideas are used interchangeably. But it's possible for us to treat them individually:

- It mentions the word "prayer." We can think of this as a very general idea about approaching God to speak to him.
- "Supplication" is that part of our prayer when we ask for things.
- And the requests it mentions are obviously those very specific things we ask for.

We see Paul slips in the word “thanksgiving.” All our prayers should be accompanied by an attitude of thanksgiving. It includes saying thanks for specific blessings, but it’s bigger than that. It’s an underlying state of heart which is always ready to thank God for all things, both good and bad.

Verse six begins by speaking about the anxiety which this prayer fully washes away. And this attitude of thanksgiving will acknowledge the very causes of our anxieties are ordained by God for our eventual good. It says in Revelation that if we suffer at God’s hand, it shows he loves us. So when trouble comes, you might pray *Lord, I do thank you for all things, even the difficult situation you’ve placed me in today. I don’t like it, and I wish it didn’t exist, but let your will be done. I know you have my good in mind always, so help me understand what I’m to learn through this trial. And let me be joyful in the midst of it.*

This peace is beyond comprehension

Let’s think about more about this peace which exists in the nature of God. Gideon goes even further when he says:

Judges 6:24—Then Gideon built an altar there to the LORD and called it, The LORD Is Peace...

The Lord *is* peace. It’s part of who he is. He existed in a state of solitary bliss before this universe ever existed, and he enjoyed absolute peace within himself.

The word “peace” in v7 obviously began its life in the Greek language. And the Greek word used for peace is *eirēnē*. And yes, it is where we get the name Irene from. And this word has a variety of meanings including a lack of anxiety and a position of safety.

Verse 7 tells us this peace of God “surpasses all understanding.” Now if this peace of God becomes ours, we can understand that. We enjoy peace. We get it.

What this verse means is that **this peace as it exists in God is far greater than anything we can imagine**. It’s a level of peace we could never understand.

And once we acknowledge that the peace of God is something far higher than us, we also then fail to understand how we can ever enjoy a degree of peace like that.

But it’s God’s will that we enjoy a measure of it. And we need to point out that we can’t enjoy the peace **of** God until we have peace *with* God.

Romans 5:1—Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

When you placed your faith in Jesus Christ, it’s like a kind of warfare between you and God ended. Peace broke out! And as I said earlier, it’s only when someone is in this position that they can enjoy the depth and breadth of peace found in God.

I mentioned that there are those who think peace is about hippies sitting in a field making the sign of peace and singing, *Give peace a chance*.

But we've already said that the state of peace between us and God came after a period of hostility between us. The peace which was enjoyed across the empire of Imperial Rome was won through a lot of bloodshed. And that's very different from the New Age idea of peace.

It so happens that the Scriptures associate the word peace with the strength and the rule of God:

- We've already said peace has something to do with salvation
- When God raised Jesus from the dead, he was described as the "God of peace"
- Paul tells the church at Rome that Satan would soon be crushed under their feet by the "God of peace."

It reminds us that this God of peace is the God who achieves victory against all enemies in order to achieve peace both now and in the world to come.

This peace is an antidote to anxiety

Anxiety could be said to be the complete opposite of peace. To be anxious means to lack peace on some matter.

To be anxious in the normal sense is sinful. It means you're worrying about something as if it isn't in the hands of Almighty God. He planned your circumstance, he brought it about, and he has a purpose for how he'll use it for your good. To be anxious about it is to worry it's out of control. That means you don't believe God is in control.

Now there are also very real mental health conditions which cause uncontrollable anxiety. It's too complex to go into today, but I'll make just a couple of points.

There are, alas, some Christians who believe we shouldn't take advantage of the healthcare provided for us in our society. If they ever tell you that to seek help from healthcare professionals displays a lack of trust in God, you mustn't listen to them. You may like to tell them that any beneficial ability someone has was given to them by God. He raised up the doctors and the nurses to be able to help people—even if most of those professionals remain enemies of God. Sometimes, these professionals do harm rather than good, such as the doctors involved in killing children in their mother's womb.

God also gave people the ability to develop medicines. These have been a great benefit to millions of people. But again, it's not all good. We shouldn't assume that if the health service is in agreement over a particular strategy, it must be the right one. For example, most people in this room would trust the vaccines brought out to treat Covid. Yet in the very recent past, the entire medical profession fully supported the rollout of a risky drug which caused birth defects in thousands of children. We should have a degree of trust in the

health profession, but we shouldn't have absolute trust. Every one of them is a sinful creature; remember that.

The point I'm making here is that, in the field of mental illness, we should avoid two extremes. One extreme is to avoid taking any medication under any circumstances. The other extreme is to rely too heavily on drugs to fix something which could be resolved through a more natural change of attitude as directed in the Scriptures.

I'll make just one more point about recognised mental illness as a cause of anxiety. The very existence of mental health issues is itself a result of the sinfulness of mankind. Just as bodily disease and death resulted from the fall and was "inherited" by us all, so it is sin also brought about problems with the functioning of the brain. So I just want us to be aware that both spiritual despondency and diagnosed mental illness stem from mankind's sin, and every one of us have partaken in that sin.

What are some of the causes of anxiety?

- Work difficulties
- Marital problems
- Financial difficulties
- Family responsibilities
- A troubled child
- Health issues

There's so much which can cause anxiety in our lives. And even if we know sin is behind our anxiety, there is not one of us who hasn't fallen prey to it.

Paul promises the believers here that **the peace of God is the ultimate antidote to anxiety**. For our purposes, it'll be fair to state that all anxiety in the church of God can be cured by the gift of the peace of God. Now God may ordain a shortcut out of a state of anxiety through drugs, but all the tablets in the world cannot produce the peace of God. I'm betting that far too many Christians have resorted to prescription drugs before pursuing a remedy through prayer.

I'm simplifying the matter here because I have to. But in every case of anxiety among the people of God, my first counsel would be about prayer. I'd encourage them to pray more. I'd encourage them to get in the habit of listing the many things they'd received at God's hand and thanking God for every one of them.

If we believe what we read here, those steps will produce dramatic results.

The picture Paul uses to describe how the peace of God can help us in this way is quite impressive. He says in v7 this peace will guard our hearts and minds. We're to imagine an

invincible soldier standing next to us guarding our thoughts and emotions and fighting off anxiety whenever it comes our way.

Absolute peace is likely something none of us will ever enjoy as a constant experience. But as with all blessings, God has an inexhaustible supply of peace available to the believer. That's why we have to believe a state of perfect peace, unbroken, is at least theoretically possible. The truth is none of us will ever give ourselves over to prayer to such degree to test this theory!

But I still encourage you to pray more and have a real desire for this peace from God. It's not just about having a warm feeling of peacefulness. It's about a greater confidence that there now exists a state of peace between you and God. It's about peace between you and the brethren. And it's about having peace in your heart even as you witness your own deterioration and face up to your eventual death.

Paul identifies the believers here in an interesting way. He describes them as those who laboured with him in the cause of the gospel. And it'd be good if believers today were of the same mind. They should ask themselves honestly if they are fellow labourers with their pastor or other leader. Do they get behind him with prayer and action during his various exploits for God?

In v5, the believers are also expected to behave in a way appropriate for an ambassador of Jesus Christ. When people think about us, they should be aware of just how different we are from what they'd expect. It says here, "let your reasonableness be known to everyone."

This word is translated differently in different Bibles. One says "gentleness," another "good sense," another says "courtesy," and yet another says "moderation." These are all quite proper translations of the word, and although they differ slightly, we get the idea. If you become a model citizen of Zion, as I encouraged you last week to be, it will be noticed by the people in this world, and it will give weight to your testimony.

One more thing we notice about Paul as he refers to these Christians is he says their names are in the Book of Life. God has—has always had—a specific list of individuals who he was going to save from sin. He loved them from eternity. He gave his only begotten son so that every single one of these would not perish but have everlasting life.

Is your name in the Book of Life? Do you have confidence your name is there? Do you believe Calvary was for you?

All we've said today is centred around Christ Jesus the Lord. Paul encourages us there to rejoice. He repeats it. *Rejoice! I'll say it again: rejoice!*

So if you are in Christ today, friend, I encourage you to rejoice. And I encourage you to rejoice *in Jesus*, who says to every one of you that are his, **“I give my peace to you.”**

Amen.