

# A Peace That Keeps

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*Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus – Philippians 4:1-9 (6-7 printed)*

## Background

Paul speaks so warmly of the Philippian church, using words like partnership, joy, affection and completion. All of this was the framework for dealing with a church that truly was not at peace. Fights were happening between members of the church. While we don't know the specifics around the arguments we can see that there were issues of pride, entitlement, possession, jealousy and striving, and all of that was serving to undermine the testimony of the church. Paul needed to deal with this and get them back on the right path.

*Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage [something to be grasped] – Philippians 2:3-6*

Some of the members of the Philippian church were wrapped up with things that were taking them out of the mind of Christ. The likelihood is that these people were not trying to be spiteful, but encountered situations that caused them to be anxious, and therefore act in ways that were not representative of what we would expect of Jesus or his followers. Paul addresses this as he refocuses them, and gives us the path for living in the peace of God.

## Content With Myself

*He went on to say, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him." From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him. "You do not want to leave too, do you?" Jesus asked the Twelve – John 6:65-67*

Jesus was "God on Earth", with a mission to bring people to the Father. He could have spent his time talking about who he was, how he was God, and if like us, probably would have gotten upset if people didn't believe him right away. He didn't do that though. There was a certain contentment about Jesus – a contentment that kept him from striving for position or popularity. Jesus was fully content to be just who he was whether people were on his side or not. For Jesus, "being God" wasn't important – being in right relationship with the Father was. When Jesus was being

challenged by Pharisees and scribes, or even by his own disciples, Jesus wasn't swayed, because he knew where his peace came from.

*Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God, so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him. – John 13:3-5*

Jesus did what was the job of the lowest person in the room and had no issues with his manhood, his position, his status doing it. Because his peace, his contentment came from knowing who God was, who he was, and who he was in God, none of the external things mattered, allowing him to do what no one else would be willing to do. Mother Teresa said, "If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other." Jesus knew to whom he belonged

Paul was addressing members of the Philippian church that did not have this contentment. The peace they sought was based in external things – jobs, activities, recognition, position, etc. When peace is based on these things, it implodes under the pressure and becomes immobilized, because these things were never designed to give lasting peace. Fulfillment, yes, but peace? No. Lasting peace only comes in knowing God and who we are in him.

## Peace and QUIET!

When we think of peace, it is often associated with words like

- tranquility
- silence
- stillness

We picture peace the way it is described in Psalm 1:

*That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in its season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever they do prospers – Psalm 1:3*

That is such a desirable picture, and something that we can all aspire to. How we get there, however can be a different story. Bill Cosby says, "parents are not really interested in justice. They want peace and quiet." (*Bill Cosby, Fatherhood*). In other words, we will get peace by any means necessary.

## Peace by War

Think back over history, how many wars were fought over *eliminating the threat to our security*. Because a nation, a group, a person represents anxiety for me, I will do what I can to bring peace, even if it is accomplished through violence. The wars are not only external – we fight within ourselves to achieve some level of peace:

*What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You desire to have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do*

*not ask God. When you do ask you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures – James 4:1-3*

On Black Friday, people don't go out with the plan to kill or injure others, but year after year it happens. Similarly, we don't intend to hurt others or ourselves, but if we are not conscious of our internal battles and what we will do in order to gain what we think is peace, we will repeat cycles of hurt and abuse

### Peace by Avoidance

*They left that place and passed through Galilee. Jesus did not want anyone to know where they were because he was teaching his disciples. He said to them, "The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise." But they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it. They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the road?" But they kept quiet [KJV: Held their peace] because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest. – Mark 9:30-34*

The disciples were ok with fighting among themselves, but when confronted by Jesus, they felt that avoidance would bring peace to the situation. In sales during the close process, there is a teaching that the first person who speaks loses. For the disciples, as long as they avoided the question they would maintain peace, at least in their mind. Jesus, however saw it differently, and continued to engage them in the conflict.

*Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword – Matthew 10:34*

Jesus continued to engage the disciples because he knew **what they had externally was not what they had internally**. As long as they continued like that, even though externally things looked fine, there was to be no real peace. This is why Jesus could make statements like he did in Matthew. He was not looking to bring "peace and quiet". He wanted to institute lasting and true peace, which sometimes only comes through interrupting the false peace we portray.

### True Peace

Earlier we looked at popular views of peace – tranquility, quiet, stillness. Peace is all of that for sure, but it is even more. The definition of peace includes:

- **to be complete**
- **be sound / healthy**
- **be restored**
- **to compensate or be compensated for**

*Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation by prayer and petition with thanksgiving present your requests to God – Philippians 4:6*

Paul is encouraging the Philippian church to find true peace, even in the struggles between people. However, he is not just talking about tolerance, or peace they could come up themselves.

*And the **peace of God**, which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus – Philippians 4:7*

The elements of this verse are pretty powerful:

- **The peace of God:** Not just “the peace that God gives”, or “the tranquility that comes from God”. This is “God’s peace”. If peace itself is being complete, then this can be seen as “God’s completeness”
- **Will guard:** “Guard” in the Greek means to “protect by a military guard, to prevent a hostile invasion or keep the inhabitants of a besieged city from flight”. In other words, He will protect you from the enemy keeping the enemy out, but even if the enemy happens to find a way in, he will keep you from having to run.
  - *You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies - Psalm 23:5*
  - *A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you – Psalm 91:7*
- **Your hearts and minds:** the place of our desires, the place of the “internal wars”. The peace of God will guard those areas so we do not need to strive for those things that do not bring peace.

## Living in That Peace

In every situation with thanksgiving... this is how Paul told the Philippians to approach God. Good or bad, fair or unfair, just or unjust. For Paul, it didn’t matter. It especially didn’t matter, as Paul was writing the letter from jail, for preaching the gospel. For Paul, every situation was an opportunity for God to reveal His peace – His completeness. As we therefore approach God, with our focus on Him and expectation of who He is, the situation ceases to be just about us, and more about what He will do in the midst of the situation. It is in this way that we experience true and lasting peace.