



PHILIPPIANS 4 LET YOUR MIND DWELL ON CHRIST

INTRODUCTION

Paul is drawing near to the conclusion of his epistle. His inspiring example has been an encouragement to live for Christ and press on as heavenly citizens toward the goal, regardless of circumstances. His instructions have been clear and convicting: our conduct is to be worthy of the gospel of Christ as we humbly serve Christ and others, being shining examples to everyone. Permeating every chapter has been the call and command to rejoice through it all!

In closing, Paul reminds the Philippians of his love for them. He then gives final reminders of how to live joyful and useful lives for Christ. The epistle ends as it began, with thanks for the Philippians (1:3) and their care and generosity toward him. Just as they have provided for Paul's needs out of their limited resources, God will supply all their needs out of His infinite riches. To Him be the glory, through the grace of the Lord Jesus.

OUTLINE OF PHILIPPIANS 4

- I. Stand Fast - Philippians 4:1-7
- II. Stay Focused - Philippians 4:8-9
- III. Sweet Sacrifice - Philippians 4:10-20
- IV. Sainly Greetings - Philippians 4:21-23

I. Stand Fast - Philippians 4:1-7

The transition word which begins the chapter is *therefore*. The word looks back to and sums up all Paul has said about being heavenly citizens and the anticipated glorious transformation at the coming of Christ. At the same time it looks ahead to the important final exhortations which are contained in the closing portion of the epistle.

To remind the Philippians of his love for them, Paul addresses them again as his *beloved* (also in 2:12) and *longed for* (also in 1:8) *brethren* (also in 1:12; 3:1, 13, 17). They are his *joy and crown*, as he looks forward to the coming of Christ (See 1 Thessalonians 2:19 where Paul also refers to the *joy and crown*). The word which Paul uses for *crown* is not the one which refers to the crown of a king, but "stephanos", which refers to a woven garland which was used for an athlete's victory wreath or a wreath given to honor a distinguished person. Paul's beloved Philippians were a symbol of his joy and the success of His ministry. How these words must have thrilled their hearts as they read!

The final exhortations begin with the call to *stand fast*.

A. Stand fast in the Lord - Philippians 4:1

Paul had used the same term in 1:27. In the light of all that is ours as heavenly citizens, we are to continue on in Christ without wavering. Christ is coming (3:20-21) and we want to be found in Him when he comes. The apostle John wrote, *Little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming* (1 John 2:28).

B. Stand fast in unity - Philippians 4:2-3

Two women of the church were in disagreement with one another. They were obviously influential in the church because they had worked personally with Paul (verse 2). Paul implores each of them to think and live in harmony, encouraging the same attitude which he had already called for in 2:2, *being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind*. Is there someone with whom you need to reconcile and come together in Christ's love, merging your minds so you see eye to eye?

Paul calls the rest of his fellow workers to help these women come to an agreement. The women had been a help to Paul, and now the right thing for the other believers (those whose names are in the Book of Life) to do is to help them. Are you always willing to help those in need, especially those who have been of help to you in the past?

C. Stand fast in rejoicing - Philippians 4:4

Paul gives a command to rejoice. It is not given as an option. He repeats the command twice for emphasis.

1. In the Lord - 4:4

The rejoicing is to be *in the Lord*. We are to look beyond our circumstances to the Lord. "There is enough in God to furnish us with matter of joy in the worst circumstances on earth" (Matthew Henry, The Matthew Henry Commentary).

2. Always - 4:4

There is never a reason not to *rejoice in the Lord!*

D. Stand fast in *gentleness* - 4:5

The Greek word translated *gentleness* means a "sweet reasonableness." It has the connotation of having a patient and non retaliatory spirit. The New American Standard Bible translates it as "forbearing spirit." It refers to a person who does not insist upon having his or her own way, similar to the type of character Paul described in 2:3-4. This type of gentleness is to be evident to everyone.

The reason given for developing such a character is that, *The Lord is at hand*. He is coming. "The blessed hope of Christ's coming again casts its gracious influence over all of life" Henrietta Mears, What The Bible Is All About).

E. Stand fast through prayer - 4:6-7

Paul encourages us to take everything to God in prayer. All our needs, wants, hurts, fears, burdens, distresses and decisions can be taken before the throne of grace, *that we may obtain mercy and may find grace to help in time of need* (Hebrews 4:16).

1. *Be anxious for nothing* - 4:6

Jesus taught his disciples not to worry about life and their daily needs of food and clothing. He said that worry will not add anything to one's life (Matthew 6:25-34). The same Greek word that Jesus used for *worry* is used by Paul in verse 6, translated here *be anxious for*. Christians are not to worry but to pray. *Supplication* is merely a stronger term than prayer, denoting specifically need or want.

The right spirit for prayer is thankfulness for what God has done. All we have and are we owe to God. There is always something to be thankful for! Will you stop right now and think of all that you have to be thankful for?

2. Experience the peace of God - 4:7

The peace of God is an inner calm and assurance which comes from a believer's close walk with God. It is a peace which surpasses all understanding. This not only means that the peace of God is beyond human comprehension, but it is also beyond all our own ideas and plans to try to resolve our own worries.

God's peace guards the hearts and minds of those who take everything to God in prayer. *Guard* is a military term meaning to stand as a lookout or patrol or to keep in protective custody. It is a picture which implies the inward watchful guardianship of our hearts and minds by the Holy Spirit.

II. Stay Focused - Philippians 4:8-9

Proverbs 23:7 says, *For as he thinks in his heart, so is he*. It is important to guard one's thoughts in order to prepare oneself for proper actions.

A. Worthwhile thoughts - Philippians 4:8

Paul calls us to let our minds dwell upon things that are:

true - real and trustworthy, the opposite of what is dishonest and unreliable;
noble - honorable and worthy of respect;
just - right and conformed to God's standard;
pure - wholesome with no immoral impurity;
lovely - pleasing, inspiring love and promoting peace;
of good report - positive and constructive; that which has a good ring to it;
 virtuous and *praiseworthy* - anything else that has the nature of true virtue.

All of these virtuous thoughts prepare a believer's mind for virtuous action. What kinds of things do you allow your mind to dwell upon? Your actions will show what is in your mind.

B. Worthwhile deeds - Philippians 4:9

The Philippians are instructed to follow Paul's teaching and example. They had *learned and received and heard* instruction from Paul. They had seen his conduct. They were to put to work all they had learned from him. This is also pertinent advice for us. Although we have never seen Paul, we have his teachings in his letters. We also have the example of his selfless, committed, and joyful lifestyle as revealed through his letters and the book of Acts.

Paul's promise is that if we do what he has taught and shown us, the God of peace will be with us. In faithful prayer, we will experience the peace of God (verse 7). In obedience, we will experience the presence of the God of peace Himself.

III. Sweet Sacrifice - Philippians 4:10-20

Paul formally thanks the Philippian church for the gift they had sent through Epaphroditus. The sending of the gift had been a reason for his own rejoicing, and a sweet-smelling sacrifice to God.

A. Paul's rejoicing - Philippians 4:10

The Philippians had been concerned about Paul, but had no opportunity to show it until they were able to send Epaphroditus with a gift (2:25). Paul was very grateful to accept Epaphroditus and the gift he brought. It was

a sign that the Philippians' care for him had *flourished again*. The words Paul uses mean "to revive" and picture a tree flourishing with fruit after a time of winter barrenness. A literal translation of his words would be, "You have blossomed out in your thoughtfulness for me." The blossoming Philippians caused Paul to rejoice in the Lord greatly. Is there someone who causes you to rejoice greatly? Are you the reason for someone else's rejoicing? Who might that person be?

B. Paul's contentment - Philippians 4:11-13

Paul's joy in receiving the gift was not because of his need. He was in prison and probably lacked many necessities, including money to fund his appeal to Caesar (Acts 25:10-12). But Paul had learned to be content regardless of the circumstances. The word *content* signifies a calm acceptance of life's pressures and pleasures with a strength of mind to endure. Paul is quick to add that his strength was not his own, but Christ working through Him. Christ is all the strength that is needed to meet your every need. His strength is the source of sufficiency in finding contentment. How content are you?

C. Philippians' sharing - Philippians 4:14-16

Again, Paul expresses his gratitude. The Philippians had shared in his distress. They recognized his need and they did something about it. Paul writes that in this they have *done well* (verse 14), conveying that they have done an excellent and honorable thing. When you see that someone has a need, do you reach out to help meet that need if it is in your power to do so?

1. When Paul had left Macedonia - 4:15

When Paul had first taken the gospel to Europe, the Philippian church was the only one to share with him. They had apparently given him a gift when he was departing from Macedonia (Acts 17:14).

2. When Paul was in Thessalonica - 4:16

Even before Paul left Macedonia, right after he had left Philippi, he was barely out of their sight and they sent aid to him in Thessalonica (Acts 17:1). They sent a gift to him once and again, meaning that they gave twice. After giving once, many people use the excuse that they already gave, but not the Philippians. How liberal are you in your giving to those who selflessly give their lives for the gospel?

D. Philippians' fruit - Philippians 4:17-18

More than anything, Paul appreciated the gifts from the Philippians because they were evidence of God's grace working in them and producing fruit which

would abound to their account. He was looking to the Philippians' heavenly reward. (See Matthew 5:12; Hebrews 11:26 and 2 John 8 for more about our heavenly reward.) Instead of dwelling on his own pleasure in receiving, he concentrated his attention on the good that would result for the Philippians because of their giving. What a right and refreshing response!

1. An abundant gift for Paul - 4:17-18

Furthermore, the gift of the Philippians had made Paul *full*. Their generosity had supplied him with all he needed. "A covetous worldling, if he has ever so much, would still have more; but a heavenly Christian, though he has little, has enough" (Matthew Henry, The Matthew Henry Commentary).

2. An acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God - 4:18

Paul regarded the Philippians' gift as a sacrifice to God Himself. Furthermore, he was sure that it was an offering which pleased God. It was an act of worship which was a sweet-smelling aroma to God, just as the burnt offerings of the Old Testament worshipers were a sweet aroma to the Lord (Leviticus 1:9 and on through the Pentateuch), and just as Jesus Christ Himself is a sweet-smelling aroma. Christ also *has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma* (Ephesians 5:2).

E. God's supply - Philippians 4:19

Because they had been so selfless in giving, Paul was confident that God would meet all the needs of the Philippians. It seems to be a general principle in the Bible that God supplies the needs of those who are generous. See Deuteronomy 15:10; Proverbs 19:17; Ecclesiastes 11:1; Matthew 10:42; 2 Corinthians 9:6-8 and Hebrews 6:10.

1. According to His riches - 4:19

God supplies for our needs on a scale proportionate to His wealth. Since all things belong to God, His ability to supply is never exhausted.

2. In glory, by Christ Jesus - 4:19

All the wealth which God bestows comes through Christ. All the wealth He bestows is glorious because it comes through Christ. Do you rely upon Him in all situations? Do you look to Him alone for wealth of blessing?

F. God's glory - Philippians 4:20

Paul gives God the *glory forever and ever*. God is our Father, and all glory belongs to Him.

IV. Saintly Greetings - Philippians 4:21-23

In his letters, it was Paul's usual custom to greet specific members of the churches by name. Here he greets *every saint*, all the believers in the Philippian church. He also sends greetings from the brothers in Christ who are with him and all the believers, especially those of Caesar's household, probably referring to Christian converts who were servants of the emperor.

Paul had begun his epistle with a greeting of grace (1:2), and now he closes with a benediction of grace. Grace is God's rich mercy and favor bestowed upon believers through the Lord Jesus Christ. It is only through God's grace that any of us may hope to fulfill the exhortations of Paul in this letter and attain the goal of our upward calling as heavenly citizens.

Amen confirms the truth and trustworthiness of all Paul has written.

Applications

1. In what ways is the grace of God through the Lord Jesus Christ evident in your life?
2. Is the Lord truly your source of joy? What worldly pleasures or problems are drawing you away from your Source of Joy?
3. Do you commit everything to God in prayer? How have you experienced His peace in doing so?
4. In what specific ways have you followed Paul's example in living a worthwhile life?