

# Philippians Study 5: Chapter 4

## Introduction

Paul now concludes the letter, with some specific instruction concerning some things that are happening in the church. His love and affection for the brethren is obvious as he also reminds them of the character that Christians need to develop, and how to go about it.

## Body of the Study

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## Homework and preparation for next week:

Read the notes as a refresher of the study,

Re-read the whole book in a single sitting in preparation for next week.

- *Compare the consolation that Paul describes with that of your own life*
- *What can you do to emulate the example of Paul, Timothy, Luke and Silas?*

## Notes for study 5: Chapter 4

### Introduction

Paul now concludes the letter, with some specific instruction concerning some things that are happening in the church. His love and affection for the brethren is obvious as he also reminds them of the character that Christians need to develop, and how to go about it.

### Body of the Study

#### *What do the Philippians need to do?*

Following directly on from the last section, Paul tells them to *stand fast in the Lord*. He doesn't leave it there – he builds them up and encourages them – “...*my beloved and longed for brethren, my joy and my crown...*” This section again clearly shows the strong and affectionate bond that Paul has with the brethren. He is longing for them. To go to Philippi to be with them would be like returning home to Paul – it is his home-away-from-home (although Paul really didn't have a home – perhaps Antioch could best be described as his home congregation – they (Antioch) had certainly sent him out on his journey. He was born and raised in Tarsus, and he certainly returned there on a number of occasions – was it because he still had family there? When we consider what Paul did during his lifetime, and the amount of time he spent travelling, we can well understand that he could not have achieved what he did (or what the Lord achieved through him) if he had the “encumbrance” of a wife and family). So, Philippi was certainly a place that Paul felt comfortable with.

Paul also describes the brethren as *his joy and crown*. The brethren were faithful, and Paul's greatest joy would be to present them to the Lord on the day of judgement (2:16).

But there is a problem in the Philippian church. Two of the sisters are at odds with one another. And having the two in such a relationship is enough to tear the church apart. Paul uses very strong language “...*I implore...*” them to sort the issues out. He wants unity in the congregation, but not unity at any price. Unity comes from “...*being of the same mind in the Lord...*”

There is an interesting comment made about these two sisters from their names:

Euodia means *fragrant* although some have said that it means *good* (and that she is characterised by her *good works*). Syntyche means *fortunate* and the same people who attribute *good* to Euodia attribute *syncopate* – to bind the parts together – to Syntyche. So, here are two women – one known for her good works, and the other known for her ability to draw things together, and they are at odds with one another.

(The) two women ... are instructed to bring their attitudes into harmony. Paul does not indicate which one was in the wrong but knows that if the attitude of each would be formed "in the Lord," the disharmony would vanish. Repetition of "I plead" may indicate the need for separate admonitions because the rift between them had become so great. Paul's method of handling the problem suggests that it was not a doctrinal issue, but a clash of personalities. (NIVBC)

I should point out that there are other writers who consider the investigation of what is (or may or may not be) behind the meaning of the name as *fruitless*. I am not advocating one view or the other – but merely point out that if it were correct, that it does help to explain what might be going on in the congregation.

Paul says that these women once worked side by side with him – so he has personal knowledge of them – perhaps they might have been amongst the first converts at Philippi – from those amongst the riverside.

Rarely are people named in Paul's letters – except for greetings, and the fact that Paul actually names these women shows the sense of bondage that he has to them. Rather than a sign of criticism, it is a sign of friendship. But the dispute between these two women is not something that was of a personal nature – Paul tells them to *be of the same mind in the Lord*.

If we put all of this together, we have (possibly) one sister who is full of good works, and another who is good at making things happen, and they are both at odds with one another on how they can serve the Lord effectively. Neither of them is to be criticised for their motives (Paul doesn't deal with them as he does with those in Corinth who need to be corrected). But the problem is bringing the church undone.

Paul urges one of the brethren there to help them to reconcile their work. Their labour is not forgotten, and their names are written in the Book of Life.

### ***What virtues does Paul urge on the Philippians?***

The *behaviour* of the Philippians has caused a problem between some of them. It is one thing to have perfect understanding of what God wants us to do, and quite another to put these things *into practice* in our lives. Paul's call to the Philippians is to how to address the situation, and come to a practical resolution of how we live and create values in our lives.

- ***Rejoice in the Lord always***

Paul says not only to rejoice, but he says that that rejoicing is to be in the Lord. But he doesn't leave it there – he repeats it for emphasis – *and again I say, rejoice!*

This suggests (for the third time in the letter) that perhaps some of the brethren in Philippi might enjoy being miserable (c/f 2:14; 3:1). We have every reason to rejoice as Christians, and Paul has already spelled out the reasons through the letter. Whilst Christians are not immune from sorrow, nor should we be insensitive to the sufferings of others, we do have (and ought to have) the greatest joy because of our relationships with others (as brothers) in this life, for our relationship with God, and for the life which lies beyond the grave!

From the very beginnings of the church in Philippi, Paul and Silas demonstrated the kind of action that God wants us to have. Whilst they were (unlawfully) chained to the wall in the prison, they were singing songs of praise and joy. It is no surprise that Paul exhorts them to joyfulness.

- ***Let your gentleness be known***

No single word is adequate to translate this word. Involved is the willingness to yield one's personal rights and to show consideration and gentleness to others. It is easy to display this quality toward some persons, but Paul commands that it be shown toward all – Christian friends, unsaved persecutors, false teachers, anyone at all. Of course, truth may not be sacrificed, but a gentle spirit will do much to disarm an adversary.

As an encouragement, Paul now reminds his readers that "the Lord is near," a reference to the Parousia (cf. 3:20-21; cf. Jas 5:8 for a similar connection between a longsuffering spirit and the Lord's coming). This statement is a reminder that at his arrival the Judge will settle all differences and bring the consummation that will make most of our human differences seem trifling. (NIVBC)

Perhaps 'graciousness' is the best English equivalent; and, in the context here, it is to be the spirit of willingness to yield under trial which will show itself in a refusal to retaliate

when attacked. It may have seemed an impossible ideal to the Philippians, but the preceding verse is a reminder that such a quality ‘is the outshining of joy in the Lord’,<sup>1</sup>

The phrase *The Lord is at Hand* appears to be a common invocation, similar to *O Lord come!* But it certainly enhances the point of the return of the Lord who will come to vindicate the oppression of His people.

- ***Be anxious for nothing***

This verse is one of the better known verses in the entire scriptures. It almost needs no comment. We need to learn to put our trust in God, for He supplies all of our needs. We must not forget to pray – we talk to God, and He supplies our needs – and *with thanksgiving* we let our requests be made known to God.

- ***The peace of God***

The peace of God comes after we have done the things above – rejoiced in our blessings (and our persecutions) – expressed our gentleness to others – and traded our anxiety for prayer and thanksgiving – then we will have the peace that comes from God.

But note what Paul says that the peace of God brings – it “...will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus...” (4:7). When we have put these things in place in our lives, then we will have peace, and the peace will guard our hearts and minds – we will enjoy God’s happiness as long as we let His peace dwell in us.

### ***How do we need to act?***

Paul uses a repetitive phraseology for the things that we should think about. There is an implied contrast to the things that we should not think about! Think about things that are:

- True
- Noble
- Just
- Pure
- Lovely
- Of good report
- Virtuous
- Praiseworthy

In contrast to the things that we see in the world, and the things that world *thinks about*, we are to think on the spiritual things. Paul next uses his personal example amongst the Philippians as the type of example that they should follow.

### ***Concluding remarks***

Paul now moves to the conclusion of the letter. His example amongst them was exemplary, and his care and concern for them is also exemplary (vs 9). The Philippians always cared for Paul – and they would have cared and helped him more, but they lacked the opportunity to do so (vs 10).

Paul speaks of his own needs. He is not trying (in any way) to criticise the Philippians for what they hadn’t done. He says that in whatever circumstances that he finds himself in, that he can find contentment in it. But the real strength that he has comes from the Lord (vs 12-13).

The Philippians had done some extraordinary things in supporting Paul. From the very first, they had supported him where no other churches had done so. He mentions Thessalonica. After the (relatively) short stay in Philippi, he went to Thessalonica. *Time and again* the Philippians sent him money whilst he was there. In reading Acts (chapter 17), one would draw the conclusion that Paul was only in Thessalonica for about 3 weeks. But the passage here suggests that his stay was

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<sup>1</sup> Martin, Ralph P; Tyndale New Testament Commentaries “Philippians” ISBN 0-85111-860-7 p.168

longer – probably several months. [What Acts 17 says is that he was in the *synagogue* for 3 sabbath days – it doesn't say how long he was in the city].

The picture that we have here of the Philippian church is one of a caring and sharing church. One that puts themselves into debt for the sake of Paul and the gospel:

<sup>2CO 8:1</sup> And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. <sup>2</sup> Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. <sup>3</sup> For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, <sup>4</sup> they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. <sup>5</sup> And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will. (2 Cor 8:1-5 NIV)

The chief example of the churches that Paul has in mind is the church at Philippi (but that is not to exclude what Thessalonica or Berea did).