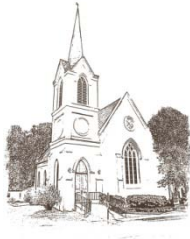


Gaining Harmony by Rejoicing and Praying

Philippians 4:1-7

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Let's get our bibles out and turn to Philippians chapter four. We are working at quite a quick rate through the book of Philippians. As you know I can't seem to stop. I had not planned on going through the entire book, but there is so much in this book to teach us as Christians how to live in a fallen world and how to deal with contentment in a gracious spirit, in spite of the trial. Paul was in jail for the gospel. He wrote the prison epistles: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon, and all of these four epistles carry some similar things; things he was thinking about at that time.

Let us begin reading at Philippians 4:1-7,

"Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown, in this way stand firm in the Lord, my beloved.

I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord. Indeed, true companion, I ask you also to help these women who have shared my struggle in the cause of the gospel, together with Clement also and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! Let your forbearing spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

We saw last time in chapter three that Paul instructed the Christians in Philippi to think straight; to think straight about life and living faithfully as a Christian. Because, as a man thinks, so is he. This whole letter is written to help the thinking of the Philippian Christians, especially in the circumstances that they were in. He loved these people. If you go back to Acts 16 you find Paul on the riverbank at Philippi because there was no synagogue in the city at that time: only a few Jewish women worshipping on the riverbank. He preached the gospel of Christ to them, and the bible says the Lord opened Lydia's heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul. Grace was at the beginning of the church. Paul loved these people and it was founded, mainly at the beginning, with a few women who believed.

But it had grown from there and had become Paul's beloved. He says, "My beloved brethren, my joy, my crown..." and he meant by those words: my crown—one day he would stand before Christ and these Philippian Christians would be standing by his side as a great joy to him as he presents them to Christ in worship and thanksgiving. So, when he writes this letter to correct some problems in their lives, he is writing as one who loves them dearly and had proven that by the sacrifice of his life to bring them the gospel and even to go to prison for the gospel. So he writes this letter to help them; to help them to live for Jesus Christ faithfully and joyfully everyday for the issue of rejoicing and having joy as a Christian. It is all through this letter.

Yet he was in prison. They were outside and free. How could he have joy? But he did, and he wrote this letter to help them find joy; to find comfort, peace and happiness in living in Christ. But he had heard of some problems in the church. Some of them were grumbling and complaining in chapter two, disputing with each other. In fact, the unity that was once there in the church in those days when

it began, where everyone is excited about the gospel and starting a church, was beginning to decline; that unity, that joy in Christ. Some were grumbling and complaining, so he wrote from jail to remind them of some things in the way they should think and the way they should live with each other in love and peace and believing in harmony together as a church.

Ultimately what Paul was doing through this letter was trying to teach them how to think comprehensively about the gospel of Jesus Christ. Not just that Jesus died upon the cross to atone for their sins, to grant forgiveness, and when they died they go to heaven somewhere, but far more than that: he died to change them on earth, that they may be Christ-like in the way they live in their family, and at work, and in church together; that they may show the power of God to change human nature by the grace of God in Jesus Christ and to teach people how to love again; how to love God with all their heart, how to love their neighbor as themselves, and to spread that gospel—that good news of redemption to others around them. He wanted them to think not just about the cross of Jesus, but the empty tomb—that he rose from the dead and is alive. It is a fact of this creation.

“Though we cannot see Him,” Peter said, “we love Him; though we do not see Him now we rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory.”

He wanted them to live and see the invisible God by faith and live that way. He wanted them to remember that this world as we know it, now fallen from Adam and Eve’s sins and from our own sins, (our own lives broken by our own sins), is not going to be like this forever. We are not to put our hope in this world and in the fallenness of man to find joy and contentment and happiness every day. So, he wrote at the end of Philippians 3:17, “Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us.” He is really telling them: look at me in jail, look at my life, and look at what God has done for me and in me; and even now as I write to you, learn what God can do.

“For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ.” Now why are they enemies: “their end is destruction, whose god is their appetite.” They are always trying to present themselves as Christian teachers, but ultimately they are trying to get people to live according to the things of this world; to find prosperity, to find happiness in the way things are now, instead of the way things are in Christ.

He says, “Their god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their mind on earthly things. For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.” He wants them to live, not just with the cross before them, but what the cross has done; that there is a future: an eternal future for those who trust in Christ. There is the resurrection of the body from the dead—a new heaven and a new earth is coming in which there is no more sin and which the heaven and the earth themselves will be transformed into the beauty that we have never seen, even in the most glorious vistas we can find today upon the earth. The restoration of all things is what Christ came to do. We are going to live in that. He wants them to think about that while they are living with people on earth to keep their minds straight, to think straight as Christians, to keep us from living like a worldlings: day to day according to the circumstances: bank account good—we are ok, bank account bad—what are we going to do? People treat us nice I am happy or people treat us bad my life is miserable.

He wants us to be able to live with faith and to be able to respond to the circumstance of life: if God blesses us—with humility, if there are trials—with hope, and to live a life that brings honor to the Son of God who shed His blood upon the cross for us that other people may see that there is power in Christ, there is redemption in Christ for their lives. And it is the way we live before them that he wants them to understand; and to overcome the grumbling and complaining and the division that existed between Euodia and Syntyche and others in the church. Because our witness before the world includes our love and unity with each other; that if there is one place on earth that the love of God and the love of man exists, it is in the local church of Jesus Christ as a witness that this thing is true, the gospel. People know. They know what is going on in churches. They know what is going on between professing Christians. Many times the gospel witness loses its power and influence upon those people because of what they see in the churches.

But God has promised that those who love Christ and keep His commandments and love man and live a godly life will see the fruit of their labors in the lives of others; “for our work is not in vain in the Lord,” Paul said. So Paul wants us to think, to think about the comprehensive salvation of Christ, that we will have a world view that enables us to think clearly about each circumstance we face; and as we said last week, not to make mountains out of molehills, nor molehill into mountains.

In chapter four Paul begins to end this letter by applying this teaching in the first three chapters to a problem in the church. And the problem was between two Christian women. There was a division between them. There was some grumbings, some complaining, some kind of disruption of unity and harmony between them and it apparently had gone on for some kind. There was no end in sight to the resolving of the problem between them. This sometimes happens, even in a true church of Jesus Christ. It happened at Philippi—this great church. There was some problem between these two women and perhaps others as well.

Paul is teaching here that God doesn’t want it to stay that way. There may be disagreements or some offense that arises between Christians and unity and love diminishes, but it is not suppose to stay that way. We cannot become content with anger and bitterness and division, hard feelings, and a critical spirit toward another person. Something is wrong when two Christians cannot resolve their issues with the gospel whether it is a husband or wife, a parent or child, and Christians in the pew. Paul wants us to understand that there is a way to resolve it. That is why he is writing this letter.

So, what he does in these seven verses: he identifies what the problem really is in the church. Secondly, he provides the solution. The solution is so simple. It is so brief to the complicated problems that we think we have, that it is easy to overlook or belittle the solution. But Paul makes it clear: this is the way to go. What is the problem first of all? Well, we look in Philippians 4:1, and he says, “Therefore my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown...” who can question his love? “In this way stand firm in the Lord, my beloved.” Again he begins with *therefore*—going back to the fact that Christ had accomplished a great salvation for us; remembering the future, the resurrection of the dead, the new heavens and the new earth, *therefore*, he says, “Stand firm in the Lord, or *stay in the Lord*..” The word is actually *stanos*, you can hear the word stay. Remain; do not move from the Lord. Keep your eyes upon Christ. Keep your thoughts upon Christ. Live in Christ.

And then he says in verse 2, “I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord,” (or to live with the same mind in the Lord). This problem between these two women had grown to such a point that Paul addresses the problem in a public letter that was read to the whole congregation.

Paul, an Apostle, called these two women to settle the issue between them. And he also calls upon, in verse three, this man Clement, to help these women to settle the issue.

So, first of all, I want you to notice the existence of the problem between Euodia and Syntyche did not diminish Paul's love for them; and that in itself is a good lesson for us to learn today. Sometimes when someone causes a problem in your life there is a tendency to diminish in our love toward them, to carry a grudge, to withdraw from them, to avoid conversation and many other ways that we express our discomfort with them. It may be a husband or wife who has a diminished love because of an offense from the other or a problem that they are not able to talk out or resolve, and then it becomes a thing that you avoid or a thing that you cannot even talk about patiently and calmly.

A parent may diminish love for a child who is unruly and rejects their instructions and all the sacrifice a parent gives to raise a child. Boys and girls, it is hard for you to understand what parents have done for you, but when you have a child you are going to begin to understand from the moment that child comes out of the womb it changes your life. Twenty-four hours a day you are responsible to care for this child: feed and clothe and shelter and protect this child from harm, and to teach them how to overcome our natural selfishness; to learn how to be just a kind person; to teach them how to think about God and how to think about the world, and as you grow up as a child and become more and more intelligent and understand more of the world, you are still immature and your parents are fearful that you will make huge mistakes that will hurt your life. That feeling of bond and closeness and concern of a parent for a child never ends, but sometimes, when a child sins against a parent and is ungrateful and disrespectful to them, it is a temptation for a parent to hold a grudge against a child and become angry.

Paul affirms his love for them. He does not let their sins affect his love for them. "My beloved, my joy, my crown..." He did not let their weakness and difficulty dealing with them diminish his love for them, and neither can we. For if God so loved us, and we were yet sinners and His enemies, (which he did); if God sent His only begotten Son, the Son of His bosom, to suffer a bloody death for the crimes we have committed; if God has covered our sins with the blood of Christ and has loved us with an everlasting love, how can we refuse to love others who have sinned much less against us? It is the gospel of Jesus Christ that enables us to overcome bitterness, anger and division between us; to learn how to love our enemies as God loved us. "Love is patient, love is kind, it is not jealous, it does not take into an account a wrong suffered..."

"I am going to remember this one; you just wait. I am not going to attack you with anger but I am sure not going to give you my love!" Oh, the thousand ways we sin against love! But love covers a multitude of sins. God has covered a multitude of sins in us that we have never had the awareness to confess to Him.

And He calls us to learn from His grace, His redemption, His mercy and patience toward us, how to show that grace and mercy and patience toward others. Paul found the grace of God a never ceasing fountain of love to enable him to show love to others who were sinful. They had forgotten him. He sat in jail waiting weeks and perhaps months on food from them and clothing from them, and yet he did not hold a grudge against them. Because he understood what Christ had done for them.

Do you think this way when others had complicated your life and are not living as they should? Or, do you become like Euodia and Syntyche who quit living in harmony with each other with the same mind, the same love, the same fellowship in Christ? Paul wants them to understand the gospel of Christ has power to change us if we cannot change others. And that is the thing we need to set our minds on

in this world to have a lot more peace and contentment and happiness than we have now. As far as you're concerned, as far as I am concerned the bible is written to me and to you. And God is calling you to live according to the scriptures no matter what anybody else does.

Paul is trying to teach them, if you will deal with your own heart Euodia and Syntyche, if you will have the same mind in Christ, you will be able to show love, gracious love to each other. Deal with yourself, he is telling both these women.

Second, Paul described the problem as a lack of unity and harmony. He does not doubt their conversion, because they had not been able to reconcile whatever problem they had. He is very gracious toward them. He knew that they had helped him in the past as coworkers of the gospel. He had affirmed that their names are recorded in the Lambs Book of Life. Revelations 17:8 says that our names are recorded before the foundation of the world, before the creation of the world. This is God's sovereign election to save a people from their sins in His Son. And Paul was convinced that they showed all the marks of true Christians. He told them that their names had been written in the Lambs Book of Life. He was trying to remind them that they were going to live eternally together; raised from the dead together—the new heavens and the new earth—eternally, forever—so get it together on earth now. Live the gospel of God's marvelous salvation, now!

But they did not live in harmony with each other in the church. We do not know exactly what it was. It may have been a harsh word. There are times when people may not realize that their words have great affect on another person or something they are going through in their lives. Many years ago, there was a person who came to visit this church and left it before they even attended because some unthinking person criticized the way they were dressed and they left. Word, harsh words, critical words, unnecessary words, can sometimes create a conflict and with Euodia and Syntyche being faithful Christians who had worked with Paul and the gospel, the disagreement may have been about the ministries within the church. One thought they should do this, the other thought the church should do that, and they couldn't agree with each other. So there existed a division between them, tenseness, a disharmony together; it really doesn't matter what the problem was, Paul said it is just not right to let things remain unsettled.

It is not right for unsettled disagreements to remain between Christians whom Jesus has died for equally, whom heaven is being prepared for equally, who both have had to bow before the same Lord and pledge to Him, "I will follow you in what you say and what you think and the way I live on earth with others." Two people, whether a husband and wife, or two Christians in a church, can live together in unity if both are submitted to Christ and His word to resolve their issues and to learn how to live in unity and harmony together. That is the hope of marriage. It is the hope of families: parents and children: finally coming to a measure of understanding and peace with each other and growing up in the home.

So this was the problem and Paul addressed them as a faithful pastor. And he did not just overlook it and say, "Well, time will work it out." The problem had arisen to such a level that everybody knew about it and so he addressed it. It had to be settled. And this was solution, secondly this morning: his solution for Euodia and Syntyche to come back to unity, back to harmony; and it is an unexpected solution to me. Already he had given a solution earlier in the letter in chapter two. He had intimated that there were some problems of unity in the church and he said, "Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if any of these things exist in you, if there is

any fellowship of the spirit, if any affection and compassion, (in other words if you have any love for Christ or any comfort of His love, any work of the Spirit in your hearts) make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for own personal interest, but also for the interest of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus.”

Every time he brings it back to Christ. Every exhortation he reminds them of the Son of God and what He has done for them, so they will think straight about each other. The real problem with Euodia and Syntyche was that they were not focusing on what they had in common: the same God, the same Savior who died for them, the same Spirit who dwelt within both of them, the same purpose of their lives: which is to become conformed to the likeness and character of Jesus Christ in this life for His glory. They were being somehow selfish and prideful in their division, and they both needed to humble themselves before God and quit focusing upon the fault of the other and start focusing upon Christ and dealing with their own mind and heart.

“If there is any encouragement, if there is any consolation of love, if you have any understanding of the gospel, make my joy complete by being of the same mind.” They needed to look at each other and consider each other’s interests as more important than their own. They needed to remember Jesus Christ crucified and think about how the Son of God wanted them to think and speak toward each other. And in so doing, something wonderful would happen: the cause of the division may not fully be settled in their opinions, but their attitudes would be corrected and love and kindness and patience and forgiveness would reign between them. They needed to remember the gospel. That is the overall solution in the whole letter.

But Paul does something even further to provide the specific solution to their specific problem. In chapter 4 verse four he says, “Continually rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say rejoice! Let your gentle or forbearing or patient spirit be made know to all men. The Lord is near ... (*he is talking about the second coming of Christ*) ...be anxious for nothing but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your request be made know to God. And the peace of God which surpasses all comprehension or all understanding (*our ability to understand it fully*) will come and will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

There are two things that he calls them to do to solve this problem: the first one is to rejoice in Jesus Christ always and the second is to pray rightly about this issue. Rejoice in Jesus Christ and pray. And you see his solution here is not to correct the other or do this about the other; first deal with yourself. They needed to rejoice in Jesus Christ first of all, always, at all times, and as I have tried to explain, this is not a command to have a forced smile on your face and a false joy just because you are at church. Too many times that is really the content of a churches fellowship. All week long people live in anger at work and anger at home and they come to church with a pretend joy. That is not what he is talking about. He is talking about how you make Jesus Christ alone your joy, all the time. That is what you have to do to learn how to live with other people in peace. Christ alone has to become your joy. Rejoice in the *Lord* at all times.

If they each would do that, they would be able to live together in harmony and patience and love and kindness, in spite of the differences of their opinions. If we ever redo this sanctuary, should we have blue carpet again or shall we have pink? Well, we have always had blue and I hate pink; so I am

not moving on this one! There are many things that we think are written in stone and equal to the Ten Commandments that are not. I believe Euodia and Syntyche were arguing over something like that. The joy of the Lord is our strength. Rejoice always at all times, in all circumstances, in Jesus Christ, the risen Son of God, who sits on His heavenly throne thinking of us; interceding with the Father for us 24/7, each of us individually as if we were the only one; making all things work together for good in our lives and for His purpose.

Rejoice in the Lord. If you do that something will change in your attitude towards others, especially when the circumstances are difficult or the occasion is tense, irritating, disagreeable; if you do that and remember the Son of God and what He has been like towards you and what He is like now and what He is preparing for you and that he near and coming again, it will give you a forbearing spirit toward all men. It will help you to quiet your heart of bitterness and anger and indignation and pride. It will teach you how to love and forgive and serve your enemy as God has done for you.

So the first solution to this problem for these ladies is: turn your eyes back to Christ and rejoice in the Lord always. You cannot depend upon a human being in this world to be the location of your joy or the fountain of your joy. This world is too fallen and that even the best of men are men at best. Even the best of Christians are Christians at best. Christ is our joy, Christ is our refuge, and Christ is our hope and our future. What does he have to prove, other than a cross of shame, that he loves us and that He will keep His word to bring us to himself?

Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I say rejoice. Let your forbearing spirit be made know to all men. The Lord is near. He is coming. And every person here is going to see Him soon. Now I am not making predictions about His second coming, but however many days or years God is given you left in your life, you are going to see the Lord soon. If the Lord lets me live as long as my daddy I will see Him in 23 years, if he doesn't come before then. But I only have 23 years to go. The Lord is near and that truth should affect the way we think. We will see God. We will see Christ face to face. That is all that matters in eternity. That is the entire purpose of this universe and of our lives. Nothing is more important. So rejoice in the Lord!

But second, to deal with these issues that we face, we have to pray right. I don't mean pray perfectly, I mean pray according to God's principles of prayer. "Be anxious for nothing," he said, "but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made know to God." This is not just any kind of prayer. It is the prayer that overcomes worry; that overcomes anxiety; that overcomes the anxiety of division with another person or fear of the future and what might happen. We are not to live by worry about tomorrow. We cannot control, Jesus said, even one day added to our life. So, why worry about tomorrow? You may be dead then. We are to rejoice in the Lord always and not be anxious and worry about anything. But in everything, in every situation, continually, to pray and make supplication to God and let your request be made known to God; and the promise is: that if you will do that, the peace of God which surpasses all comprehension will guard your heart and your minds in Christ Jesus. There will be a spiritual peace that cannot be explained by logic.

I know all husbands and wives think that they can read the minds of each other but they can't. And when we start to think that we can, we are about to step over the threshold of trouble. We are not called to be mind readers of each other and understand everything about each other. We are called to live as a Christian with each other; to follow Christ toward each other. There is a peace that passes

understanding that comes from these things we are studying that guards and protects our hearts and our minds to think clearly in Christ Jesus.

Now when I describe this kind of prayer you may noticed I missed something, because this prayer has a condition to it. The answer to overcoming worry and overcoming the problems and between Euodia and Syntyche and worry and fear about circumstances of life and anything else that disturbs peace is to pray. That is right. But he says, "In everything by prayer and supplication with *thanksgiving* let your request be made know to God." *Then* the peace of God which passes understanding shall guard your hearts.

There are many people that say, "I prayed about it and nothing is happening. It hasn't worked. Nothing has changed." And when I hear that, knowing my own heart, I know that they have not prayed with thanksgiving. What does Paul mean, "In everything pray with thanksgiving?" Well the word thanksgiving, if you trace it through the scriptures of the things that God has done for us and of the things we are to be thankful for, it all begins with the word grace. For us to make a request to God and say, "I need this or I want that; please answer this prayer; please change Euodia, I can't stand her anymore." Whatever it is, it must begin with thanksgiving to God. You have to remember the grace of God and the salvation of God; that we cannot even address God as a father if Jesus blood had not been shed upon the cross for us. We would not be forgiven of one sin, much less all of us, if He had not offered Himself upon a tree so humbly, so kindly, so lovingly on our behalf. We can address God as *Father* because our sins are covered by His blood. He lived this perfect life of righteousness never thinking the way we have thought, never speaking the way we have spoken, never doing the things that we have done, and when he went to the tree He offered unto God an impeccable and perfect human sacrifice to atone for the lives of sinful humans like ourselves.

Think about that. Give thanks for Christ. Give thanks for the adoptions as sons of God. Give thanks that God will not judge us according to our sins and our salvation does not depend upon how good we are and how many works we have done, but on Christ's intercession for us; his redemption of us by faith alone and Christ alone so that the worst of sinners can find the greatest blessings of God again. In everything with thanksgiving let your request be made known to God. He has covered us with His own righteousness, he is interceding for us, and He is coming again. The Lord is near, he said. And He will raise our bodies from the dead and a universe will be remade which we have never seen with our own eyes nor experience in the most beautiful places we know; a universe in which only righteousness dwells and in which people only love each other with all their hearts and love God with all their hearts and enjoy this beautiful, remade creation forever.

Give thanks in everything with thanksgiving let your request be made know to God. For it is in giving thanks to God for what He has already done for us in Jesus Christ that you will find your mind and your heart making the right requests instead of selfishly praying for God to change your life so you can be happ. Instead of praying to God to change the other person so you can be happy finally, you come to God with thanksgiving, you consider the others interests as more important than your own, you consider that the whole purpose of your life is to give honor to Christ in the way you live, not to make Christ give you the life you want. And in the process of giving thanks, of praying for your enemy, of considering their needs as more important than your own, you begin praying, "Lord, how can I help this person? How can I serve this person? Help me to forgive this person their offenses and show them the grace and the love that you have given to me." Then if you want to pray for God to help them overcome

their sins and faults, do that; but not until then. Not until God is praised and God is thanked and your mind has been reminded of the things that “eye has not seen and ear has not heard of all that God has prepared for those who love Him.” Our future is so great. How can we think the small things that we encounter now dominate our life?

In the process of giving thanks you find your own heart forgiving them as you stand praying; remembering God’s patience with you; and your requests then are changed; your requests are for their good not your comfort, because praying with thanksgiving produces an unselfish prayer that brings glory to God. And those are the prayers He answers.

How quickly we come into the presence of God. How thoughtlessly we can do this; believing I am OK with God through Christ and now I am just going to come in and say, “God I need this today, that today, and please fix Fred today.” But every time we come to God in prayer Paul says, “In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your request be made known to God.” We are not to make a request without giving thanks first, worshipping the God who has done so much for us, reminding ourselves that things really are not as bad as we think they are and that we have been blessed beyond measure in Jesus Christ and have no reason to be discontented and complain about anything in our life and about other people.

In praying like this: dealing with our own heart in prayer, thanking God, setting our mind on Christ and His goodness to us, an amazing thing happens. It is a promise. The peace of God which surpasses all comprehension shall guard and keep your minds and your hearts in Christ Jesus. There is a spiritual peace, a comfort, a peace of mind, an overcoming of worry and fear, that is possible for the Christian; even if there is a division between Euodia and Syntyche and between husband and wife, parent and child, friend and friend, even between friend and enemy; there is a peace of God that enables you to love your enemy; to do good to those who despitefully use you; to consider others interests more than your own and have this attitude within yourselves which was in Christ Jesus.

It is a promise that if we will rejoice in the Lord always, if we will not give ourselves to worry but attack worry with prayer, and pray rightly with thanksgiving when we make our request known to God, God’s sovereignty, by His Spirit’s power, will somehow give to us a peace that passes understanding. How many times as a pastor, I cannot guess, I have heard Christians say, “I don’t understand how I have got through this, but God helped me! And I had peace.” It is often said at a graveside, when you have lost your spouse or a child, or a dear friend, and it is a huge loss in your life: a big hole, and yet those who have believed the gospel of Christ look unto His cross in atonement for our sins and his resurrection and the promise of eternal life, and they had prayed with thanksgiving that they don’t have to worry about the future of their love one; that they will see them one day. And in spite of the tears and the sorrow and the sense of loss they feel, there is a peace that passes understanding and others watch and say, “I don’t know how they do it.” And the answer is God.

For that is what true faith does: it rejoices in the Lord, always. And it seeks to have unselfish prayer with thanksgiving and believes that as we deal with our own hearts, God is able to deal with the rest of the world. And boy, there is a peace that passes understanding when you believe that! Paul does not want Christians to live with unsettled conflicts between them. He calls us to live in harmony and unity with each other, not overlooking sin, but dealing with our own hearts so that we can resolve the conflict. That is the biggest test of all. We have to make Christ alone our great joy so that we will not live and die on whether the circumstances change or the difficulties are overcome so that we can

bear witness to the character of Christ in His great and love and patience for us when we sinned against Him and give hope to this person who still will not repent or change; that perhaps there is something to the gospel of Jesus after all. And is that not what you really and should really want?

Is this how you resolve differences between yourself and others? You turn to the Lord and rejoice in Him; you turn to prayer with thanksgiving and you make sure that what you are doing in the issue is a reflection of the Son of God; a witness; a gospel witness to the person that needs Him. Husbands and wives, is this how you resolve your issues at home? It is easy to come to church on the Lord's day and dress up and put on our happy face, but how about this past week when there has been miscommunication or a harsh word, or a forgetfulness or a thoughtlessness or a bit of bitterness or anger? Did you turn to rejoice in the Lord always, to pray and make your request with thanksgiving, so that you would have your own mind right and live with this person in peace? Did you think how to help them instead of make the problem worse? Parents and children, you young people who have come to profess Christ, when your parents call on you to do something or they disagree with your opinion about something, do you make yourself part of the solution or increase the problem? Do you rejoice in the Lord always like God has called you to do? Do you pray with thanksgiving for your mom and dad or do you just kind of swallow it and let bitterness build?

You see, God wants us to live His way whether it is in the church or home or at work. And for Paul it is the only solution to rejoice in the Lord always and to pray rightly. The unbeliever lives in a world where conflicts and circumstances rule their happiness. They only believe what they can see and what they can control for themselves and are constantly frustrated because they cannot control anything. If all goes fairly well, they are happy. If someone causes a disruption or conflict than anger and worry and fear begins to rise within them and control their response. Worry, bitterness—without the hope of God's power in their lives to cause all things to work together for good, they are left with themselves and without hope and without God in the world; and until they come to Jesus Christ and trust in His gracious mercy of eternal life, the forgiveness of sins, and are restored to a fellowship with God to help them to live in this fallen world, they will stay the same. They have to come to Christ and gain humility. They need repentance for shutting Him out of their life and refusing to follow Him as their God and they need to believe the promise of Jesus Christ: the one who comes to me, who has ignored me, who has rejected me, who has violated my commandments over and over, *I will not cast out.* Amen!