

# Philippians 4:2-9

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Preacher: Iain Clements

[ 0 : 00 ] So let's turn back to Philippians 4 and we're going to look at these verses together. It must have been an incredibly exciting evening to gather together.

There would have been a number of reasons for that. For Sars, it would have been a huge relief for you to see Epaphroditus back with you. As a church, you sent him off to visit the Apostle Paul in prison.

You've given him the task of taking the gift that you've sent to give to Paul. But you actually got very worried because you'd heard reports back that Epaphroditus had got very sick.

In fact, the nightly prayer meetings that you held for his healing had been held in your very house. It was just so wonderful to see him back in your midst, looking so well standing at the front.

More than that, he's now back and he's reading out a letter from the Apostle Paul himself addressed to you. Now for some in your church, that was a novelty in itself.

[ 1 : 28 ] They'd not met the Apostle Paul, but you had. You knew him personally. You'd worked alongside him. You'd supported him. You'd worked with Clement and with others.

As you think about that, you think, well yes, also you'd worked alongside Sintake. But as you think, you kind of think, well the less said about her, the better. Your husband's still close, but you struggle with her a little bit.

It's difficult to say why. It just seems to me that whenever you get together, you argue. But you kind of push that thought out of your head. You don't let her ruin this great evening together.

But as Epaphroditus reads out this letter, you are thrilled. It is wonderful to know just how encouraging your church has been to Paul.

Although as you read through the letters, you hear the letter read, you wipe away a few tears at the thought of him in prison alone. You're absolutely astonished to hear of some Christians trying to build a reputation for themselves while he is in prison.

[ 2 : 34 ] Some people, you think, you just wish they were here to hear Paul's command, to have the mind of Christ. And then you've heard this last section in chapter 3, and it's been really challenging to you.

You kind of think, well if the Apostle Paul needs to press on to the goal, then how much do I? You think, well it's just a wonderful mark of the Apostle Paul's love for you.

And actually, God's love for you, as you know the Apostle Paul is speaking God's words, that he warns you, that he challenges you, that he underlines the need you've always felt to be careful about doctrine and teaching and lifestyle.

Stand firm thus in the Lord, you hear. You even perhaps let out a hearty Amen at that point. And there's something out of nowhere, you hear your name.

I entreat Euodia, and I entreat Syntyche, to agree in the Lord. Feels for a moment like the world stops spinning.

[ 3 : 41 ] You want the ground to swallow you up at that point. You certainly perhaps feel like crying. Everyone is there, they're staring straight to Epaphroditus as he's reading the letter, but you know that they just want to turn around and look at you at that point.

Well, I obviously used a bit of imaginative license there, but that must have been the kind of thing that happened when Exeter was first read. You've got to feel a bit sorry for these two women mentioned here, don't you, as you come to verse 2 of chapter 4.

But it's interesting, isn't it? We haven't read through the whole of Philippians to get to this point, but this verse doesn't come out of the blue. Philippians is a letter all about partnering together for the Gospel.

It is a letter all about the importance for Christians to stand firm, not as individuals, but together as a church, contending, standing firm in one spirit, with one mind, striving side by side for the faith of the Gospel, as Paul says at the end of chapter 1.

But now in the church in Philippi, there is a situation that is harming that, that is putting that in danger. And there's a situation which actually is so basic, so obvious, so, to be honest, probably so true of almost every church, both from then on.

[ 5 : 07 ] So it's important that we hear about it. These verses, verse 2, and then actually the rest of these verses, in these three paragraphs that Chris read out earlier, I think we're all kind of joined together on this great theme.

And they tell us something very important, I think, about how we live together as the church, and what it means to have peace together as God's church. So let's look a little bit more in detail at these verses.

First, let's look at the issue in verses 2 and 3, which I've called as a kind of heading, the need for peace in the church, the need for peace in the church.

As I said, Paul speaks in, doesn't he, to a particular situation in the church of Philippi. So just listen again to the verses, I entreat Eurodio, I entreat Syntyche, to agree in the Lord.

Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women who have laboured side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers whose names are in the book of life.

[ 6 : 15 ] Now all we have about the situation is, all we know about the situation is what we have here in these verses. There's an issue, there's a disagreement that's affected a relationship between two people in the church and that breakdown in this relationship is clearly having an effect which is bigger than just these two women.

Even Paul, in prison miles away, has heard about this situation. Perhaps if Aphrodite has mentioned it to Paul, it was big enough for it to be a concern that has passed on.

And Paul doesn't dismiss it, he is concerned, isn't he? He uses strong language in these verses.

Intreat, which kind of means plead. Paul is saying, look, this needs to be sorted out.

Now although we don't know the precise details of the problem, I think we can probably rule a few things out. The issue here probably isn't doctrinal.

Paul isn't known for pulling his punches, is it, when it comes to gospel issues. He's already said in this letter that there's a group known to the Philippians who are dangerous, they are in the wrong.

[ 7 : 29 ] It's unlikely these individuals are disagreeing over who Jesus is or how to get saved. I think Paul would have gone into far more detail at this point if that was the case.

It's also unlikely to be kind of directly a kind of sin issue. Paul does kind of call sin out, particular sin issues out.

In other letters, doesn't he? You think of 1 Corinthians, with some of the particular issues of sin and sexual sin that Paul deals with there. It's unlikely, for example, that you only had an affair with Sinski's husband or something like that.

It's more likely to be, well, what it says, a disagreement. Well, I guess a kind of long-running personality issue that shows itself in terms of disagreements.

It's no kind of direct or kind of individual sin has been committed, no disagreement on core doctrine, but they're just not getting along in an obvious way.

[ 8 : 38 ] And in a way that everyone in the church knows. And perhaps in such a way that those not in the church even know about it. But why is this so important?

Why does Paul feel the need to name names at this point? We might think, well, surely that's just normal in any reasonable-sized group of human beings. They're just going to be people who just don't get along.

Well, the issue is what Paul has said about God's church in this letter. God, through the Apostle Paul, isn't writing to any other ordinary group of human beings.

He's writing to God's church in Philippi. We hear it as God's word to his church here tonight in evening. Who's the church? Well, the church are, first one, the very beginning of the letter, the saints in Christ Jesus.

We are the end of chapter one and then repeated in chapter three. It's a theme to the letter. We are citizens of heaven. Together we have a purpose, a mission together.

[ 9 : 44 ] Two, the end of chapter one, stand firm in one spirit with one mind, striving side by side for the faith of the gospel. We are together to have one mind.

For chapter two, what is that one mind? It is the mind of Christ Jesus, where most of us should be very familiar with those verses about Christ in chapter two, in verses five to 11, but they are plied as the kind of the mind that we are to have.

It's holding up to us the humility of Christ to show how we are to live in the church. When people look at the church, they should get a feel for who Jesus is, why he came, his humility.

And they'll either be attracted, or they'll be repelled, but because of the gospel. And once you see that, it's clear, isn't it?

Whatever's going on with these two women, that single-mindedness has begun to disappear.

Whatever's going on, they've stopped serving each other, they've stopped treating each other as better than themselves, they've stopped having that unity of mind and concern for God's gospel.

[ 10 : 58 ] They're not working side by side. Kind of in the image that Paul uses, I think you can almost kind of imagine like the front row of a rugby team that are there together, ready to pick each other up when they fall.

That's not happening with these two women. And so what's happening is that their disagreement isn't just having an impact on them, but it is having an impact on the whole church. When you think about it, it's true, isn't it?

Disunity always cripples any team. You don't have to think about church life to see that. It doesn't matter what causes the disunity. If there's a team not pulling in the same direction, there's always going to be disaster.

You can think that, sporting illustrations, you can think of political illustrations of that. Oh, can't you? And it's hard to hear, isn't it? It's hard to listen to these two verses, because actually what's going on between these two women is just so sadly common in local church life.

It can be so common that actually we can easily ignore it. Now, we've got to recognise in any living church where we are all committed to one another, where we're all committed to the gospel, we're all passionate for the Lord, there's always going to be disagreements over issues.

[ 12 : 16 ] It's not simply, it's not the kind of disagreements, the fact that we disagree on certain issues that's the issue. In a sense, it's life. It shows we care. It would be worrying if there weren't any discussions over things.

But you see when those disagreements become personal, when they go into disputes, when they go into struggles between individuals, or families, or groups, when those discussions then be cut to the heart of the unity, and the single-mindedness, and the passion together for the gospel, for Christ, well, that's when the warning lights on the dashboard of the church start flashing.

What does Paul say should happen? He doesn't just kind of point out the problem. He actually gives a bit of a solution, doesn't he? He doesn't ignore the problem, hoping it will go away.

He brings it into the open, doesn't he? Doesn't encourage each of these individuals to email their friends and get different groups into church on their side. No, he doesn't do that, although that might soften our temptation in this situation.

Notice he does two things. Firstly, he reminds these individuals who they are and what they are a part of. When you're in the middle of a dispute or an issue with someone, it's very easy, isn't it, to have your head full of the disputes.

[ 13 : 44 ] Get very focused on very small things. Get very focused on defending your corner and defending your reputation. You go inward. You think about what's going on in your head and imagining what's going on in someone else's heart.

But have you seen this first, what Paul does? He leaps their eyes up from themselves and from the disputes. He says, just remind yourself of what you're a part of. Can you imagine that's two soldiers on the same side in the First World War falling out in the trenches?

I don't know how you deal with that in that situation, but you can imagine, can't you, the officer coming to them and reminding them of the importance of the fight they are in and who the real enemy is.

And in a sense, that's what Paul does, doesn't he? He says, look, you are fellow workers. You see that at the end of verse 3? He says, look, you've labored side by side for the gospel around the world.

And that's why you're in Philippi. So don't destroy what you have worked for. Look, he says at the end of verse 3, your names are in the book of life. The Lord Jesus Christ has saved you.

[14:56] Your eternity is secure. Your identity is in him, not in how you're viewed by other people or getting your own way. So even if it feels like you need to swallow some pride now to kind of move forward and to get past this, well, then you can do it.

Because you're known by the Lord and that's what counts. What matters ultimately shouldn't be what the other person thinks or even what you think. It is what he thinks. It's together, the whole church, we move forward for him.

That's really what agreeing the Lord means, I think, as Paul says at the end of verse 2. That's what he wants. That's the outcome he wants. It's not that as a church we agree over, churches agree over every little thing and we become clones of each other.

In any church, there's going to be lots of disagreements over lots of things and the way things are done and certain issues. But actually, where do we agree?

Well, we agree in the Lord because we recognise that's who we belong to. We agree in him. Even as we disagree, we can agree that each of us we're brothers and sisters in the Lord.

[16:07] We are standing firm together in the Lord for Christ, for his gospel, with that humble serving mindset that you see in chapter 2, standing side by side for the faith of the gospel.

But secondly, Paul's also incredibly realistic. That's what I love about these verses. He knows the reality of life. He knows that so often these kind of disagreements, once they've escalated and become personal, he knows they need help to be overcome.

Sometimes, often, when you get a disagreement in this level, there's often disagreement, isn't there, over the nature of the disagreement. Before you can get even to the issue, you have to agree that there is an issue or what the issue is.

One person perhaps says there's sin that needs to be repented of, the other person disagrees. If it was easy to agree, these individuals would have done it ages ago, wouldn't they?

So what does he do? Well, he calls on someone else, known to them, known to him, so trustworthy, reliable, a third party to just help them deal with it.

[17:18] Now, notice how carefully Paul steps into this issue. He says, as an apostle, he could have ordered them, but actually he pleads with them. He gently asks this third party, this true companion, to help them.

And how does he do that? He reminds this third party of all the good these individuals have done, so that this third party doesn't just come in and blunder in and be patronising and be kind of ordered them about.

He's kind of lovingly pastoral. He wants it to be resolved in a very positive way, doesn't he? But I think all of us need to recognise that there are going to be times when actually, perhaps if we find ourselves in the midst of this kind of situation, we are going to need help with these issues.

And it's no shame to ask for or to receive help in this kind of situation. It feels humbling, doesn't it, to ask someone to come in and to step in even to a personal relationship that we can't sort out.

But in the church it's important. It's no shame because it's for the good of the gospel and it's for the good of Christ's glory and for the good of the witness of the church.

[18:36] So let's go back to Eurotia in our minds. Sure, she wanted the earth to swallow up when she first heard this letter read out. But as she reflected on it and carefully thought through all Paul had said, well, hopefully she heard the love that Paul had for her and for his church and for God's church in these verses.

And then perhaps when she met with Sincere and that other church member, well, I'm sure the third meeting was the most awkward meeting she'd ever been in. But then hopefully as they talked and prayed, hopefully they saw for all their differences and misunderstandings which perhaps may not have ever been completely sorted, hopefully she saw they were together in Christ, could love one another in Christ, agree that they are in Christ together and move forward together as part of his church.

And hopefully she recognised that although they perhaps disagreed that Sincere's name was in the book of life as hers was. And that like Christ she was even prepared to consider Sincere's interests greater than hers.

The need for peace in the church and in relationships in the church is enormous. So that's what Paul talks about here. But if you stop here, immediately he moves on in verses 4-7.

to kind of go beyond the personal relationships to then talk about the need for peace in our hearts and minds. The need for peace in the church and in relationships in the church but now the need for peace in our hearts and minds.

[ 20 : 14 ] Now as you look down at verse 4 it seems like Paul just kind of leaves that relationship issue in the background and he just kind of moves on to a whole other subject. In fact as you read through verses 4-7 it feels like Paul is just firing off commands and promises that aren't even directly connected to each other.

And they're all wonderful verses aren't they? They all deserve like a sermon on each sentence. And as you look at them these verses clearly apply wherever we are don't we?

When do we rejoice in the Lord? Well we rejoice in the Lord always. Who should we let our reasonableness be known to? Well everyone. When aren't we to be anxious?

Well we're not to be anxious about anything. When should we pray? Why should we pray? What should we pray? Well we should pray in everything. It is a pretty comprehensive list isn't it when you look at those verses.

But I don't think it's reading too much into these verses to think again about Eurodia as she listens to the letter being read out. Do you think these commands would have had a special resonance to her?

[ 21 : 27 ] As she thought about her broken relationship with Syntyche. If you've ever been in anything approaching that kind of situation you'll know that rejoicing is hard.

Broken relationships more than anything suck the joy that we have out of the Lord. Perhaps we begin to resent the problems that we have with that other person and resent that other person because they are harming our joy in the Lord.

Reasonableness. Well, very difficult isn't it to be reasonable if we feel we are being tested or provoked or pushed by another person.

Anxiety. Well, it's obvious isn't it that broken relationships can lead to worry and anxiety and all sorts of concerns. I don't think it's reading too much into these verses to say that these are particularly the commands that Paul knows that we need to hear and be reminded of when there are broken relationships we know that need to be mended.

We need to do these things all the time, Paul underlines that, doesn't he? But perhaps the implication is, well, even now, even in the midst of your difficult situation, Eurodia and Syntyche, remember these commands.

[ 22 : 53 ] But if you look at them, these commands aren't sticks, are they, that Paul is beating us with, they are also precious promises. When you feel sad being told to cheer up, that's incredibly annoying, isn't it?

But notice what the verse says, it's not cheer up, it'll never happen, it is rejoice, where do we rejoice? We rejoice in the Lord. You see that phrase again? He brings it out again, just as he's said to agree in the Lord, in verse 2.

Now, we have reasons to rejoice always, not because our circumstances are always what we would want, but because we are in the Lord. We are united to Christ and all that that means.

If you know Christ, this is true of you, whatever your situation you're in, we can rejoice in Christ and in who he is and in all that it means for him to be ours.

Rejoice. And actually remember the kind of human speaker of this verse, it is a man who is in prison, who doesn't know whether he's going to live or die, he's been abandoned by pretty much all his friends, and he can rejoice because of the Lord.

[ 24 : 04 ] Why be reasonable, why be gentle, as perhaps other translations put it? We think doesn't Paul know that nice guys don't get anywhere in this world, you kind of think it's the exact opposite to what our culture would say, if we're going to get ahead, if we're going to win arguments, if we're going to actually face up to people we disagree with, then we need to love ourselves and promote ourselves and have ambitions for ourselves.

And that could even seep in to the church, can't it? Perhaps we hide it well, but we would love to be known for some of our abilities in the church, our brilliance, our preaching, teaching, organisational skill, music skill, skill in all sorts of ways.

But gentleness? Who's going to notice us if we're gentle, if we're self-effacing, if we're kind, if we're humble? We do what Jesus did and put others before ourselves.

Who's going to notice us if we're gentle, even with people we're in conflict with and want to disagree with us? Well, the Lord's going to notice us.

That's what he says. The Lord is at hand. That's the promise that comes with that command to be gentle. Now, obviously, I think you can take that in one of two ways.

[ 25 : 23 ] Either it's a reminder that Jesus is coming back soon, a kind of sense of what do we want to be found doing when he returns, or perhaps, and it's probably both, actually, it's also a reminder that he is at hand now.

He's with us now. He sees, he hears, he knows. Who's going to notice us if we're gentle? Well, he is. He is.

Nothing that we do is ignored by him. And then don't be anxious. Well, as I've already said, that can sound like a very cruel thing to say.

to anyone who's worried, if it wasn't followed by that wonderful promise that we can pray. Praying is asking, really.

Should include giving thanks and praising, but it's heart prayer, it's us coming before the Lord, recognising our need of him, laying our problems and desires, recognising that he is God.

[ 26 : 31 ] And he wants to hear, he wants to act. Don't think anything is too small for him. I'm sure you, Odeon, needed to hear that. I'm sure that whole issue with Syntyche in her head perhaps seemed so big, it was just utterly insurmountable.

What did she need? Well, she needed the Lord to help her change her thinking in her heart. And Paul is saying, don't be anxious, pray. The Lord wants to hear an answer.

If you're anxious about anything this evening, I'm sure to a different degree, we're all anxious about something, I just want to ask, are you praying about that issue? There may be all sorts of things you can do with your anxiety, it might spur you on to hard work, and there may be all sorts of other good techniques and other things we can do that help anxiety and worry.

But never neglect the Bible's command, which is prayer, because the Lord is there, he cares for you, he hears, he answers. And as Paul gives you these commands, which I think deal with all, deal with kind of peace, govern our attitudes and our thinking, just notice the great promise of verse 7.

As we do these things, that peace of God will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. What's he talking about?

[ 27 : 52 ] What is his peace? Well, I'm hesitant to define it, but as Paul says it surpasses all understanding. But in a sense, it may well be the subjective wonderful feeling that God does give of the fact we are right with him.

But even if that subjective feeling isn't there, that doesn't mean we don't have that peace, because the peace of God is also the reality, the objective reality of peace with God.

The fact that we are no longer at war with our creator, the peace that has been won by Christ at the cross. No matter how we feel that relationship, the fact we're adopted and know God as our father, it's real, it is there, it will guard us, the worst has been dealt with, we know Christ.

And that then should affect our hearts and our minds, which then will go on to affect our personal relationships. We've seen the need for peace in the church, we've seen the need for peace in our hearts and minds.

And then thirdly, we close the section by seeing if verses 8 and 9, that the God of peace is with us. I think that theme of peace does flow through all of these verses, which suggest to me they do kind of hang together as one big point that is being made here.

[ 29 : 09 ] Paul's dealt with the issue, he's got behind the issue, perhaps look at our responses, and now he gets even deeper into the foundations. What's going to keep that peace? Well, that's actually not us trying to build up, kind of peace within us, but it is knowing that God, the God of peace, is with us, and that we can have our minds fixed on him.

Of course, church, we don't just need to have peace, we need to know that the God of peace is with us personally. And that's wonderfully who is promised in verse 9, isn't it? God himself is with you.

And interestingly about you there at the end of verse 9, well it's plural, it's not just me as an individual, it's us as a church. And what's a big difference should that make?

Well it changes everything, doesn't it? And every change begins with how we think. If God is with us, if we are his people, then he should fill our minds and change our attitudes, and that flows out to affecting our relationships.

relationships. And really that's what Paul is saying in verses 8 and 9. That's familiar with that whole list that Paul gives of things to think about.

[ 30 : 25 ] I think that's a little bit easy to say that Paul is simply saying think nice thoughts here, but actually there's more to it than that when you look at these verses, isn't there? It's true, isn't it, that much that clamors for my thoughts and attention to this world, it's the exact opposite of this list that Paul gives.

And obviously if we dwell on those things, we're not going to be thinking Christ's thoughts, we're not going to be having his priorities. There's much that are lies about God.

There's lots of things in this world that are just not pure in entertainment and all sorts of things. Lots in the media, in our world around it, it's just about doing people down and are mindful of those things, well actually it's not going to be godly, it's not going to be thinking God's thoughts.

It's not going to be recognising we belong to the God of peace. But we need to notice that actually verse 8 is positive, isn't it? It is not a negative command.

Those negative commands are right, it is right not to think about things that are impure, not to think about things that are lies. things. And actually this verse doesn't say empty your mind of what's wrong, actually that's quite a difficult thing to do.

[ 31 : 43 ] If I was to say if you don't think about something then the first thing that would come into your head would be that something. Don't think about pink elephants, what's the first image you've got in your head? No, he says fill your mind with those things.

And we might ask where do I find something that is pure and honourable and lovely and true and commendable and excellent and worthy of praise?

What is it that I should fill my mind with? What Paul tells us in verse 9 actually. In the gospel he preached and lived.

Think about Christ. Fill your mind with the gospel. of the Lord Jesus Christ in all its fullness. Not a kind of shortened form of the gospel.

Think about the apostolic teaching of Christ and the whole of God's word. Fill your mind with him. Listen, think on what you are taught as you gather together as the church.

[ 32 : 48 ] Meditate on scripture. But more than that, and this is really important, we are to obey it. That's how we fill our mind. That's how we think on these things. It's not just sitting by ourselves in a little room trying to meditate and think thoughts, although that is not wrong and that's helpful, but actually we fill our mind as we obey these things.

Do you see that in verse 9? What you've learnt and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things. The practice ties in with the thinking of verse 8.

You see as you read back at the start of chapter 2, the mind of Christ, having the mind of Christ for the church. Well, it's not just about thinking the right things about God. Well, it's actually about obeying God as Christ did.

So verse 4 and 5 of chapter 2 says, let each of you not look only to his own interest but also to the interest of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.

As we do that, as we think of Christ, and as we then put that into practice, which is going to be put into practice as we relate together amongst ourselves, well then there's that wonderful assurance that the God of peace is with us, not just with me as an individual, but together as the church, and we are being the church, striving side by side for the gospel.

[ 34 : 23 ] In a way, Paul is diagnosing a particular problem with these two individuals, but he's also in the diagnosis showing how to, in a sense, as a preventative measure to prevent this from happening again.

I'm sure, just as we close, it was a shock for Euodia and Syntyche, to hear their names read out as this letter was first read. But as they thought it through, perhaps years later, and perhaps it was dealt with, and I'm sure, perhaps, and I hope, they were in a sense glad it happened, as painful as it was.

I'm sure more than that, that she was in no doubt at the love that the Lord had, not just for her, but for his church. She saw the great promise of God's presence with them, but in a real way.

How as a church do we know that the God of peace is with us? Well, it's as we live it out, as we think on the gospel, and as we obey it, and as God transforms his church to think his thoughts, to react in a godly way, to view each other rightly.

What you've learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you. Amen. Let's pray, and then we will sing.