

“Heavenly Perspective Produces Healthy Relationships”

Philippians 4:1-9

Our theme this year is “Things Above”. We get this from Col. 3:1-4

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. ³ For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

⁵ Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature

As Jesus’ disciples we are assured that we have a place reserved for us with Jesus in heaven, because we have believed that the death and resurrection of Jesus paid the price for our sins. Victory over sin’s penalty - death - is promised to those who placed their faith in Jesus. ‘Things above’ refers to everything we have in Christ that salvation brings. Including the power by the Spirit to have victory over sin. But because we live in a visible sinful, earth we don’t always live with Things Above in our mind. Yet when we apply the truths of what we’re promised to our life here, it shows by our Christ like attitude and selfless actions that seeks God’s good of others.

Set our hearts and minds on what we have already guaranteed for us in heaven, will result in a God-pleasing fruitful life. And that takes a disciplined mind because we have a lot of things going on in our lives – many good, some not – but they are here on earth, and it’s not always easy seeing God’s perspective in that.

The apostle Paul had a lot of stuff going on in his life as we look at Philippians this morning. We know he’s in a Roman prison where he says in Ch. 1:21-22 that he doesn’t know whether this imprisonment will result in death or his release. A few verses earlier he was describing how some Christians were undermining his character even while preaching the gospel. Meanwhile here he’s very concerned about the Philippian church because two women have such a serious disagreement that he felt it needed public confrontation because it was dividing the church.

And that’s his own context in which he tells us not to be anxious about anything! So in order to produce healthier relationships and reduce anxiety Paul tells us what we need to do to keep a ‘Things Above’ perspective when the things below are stressful.

Again, chapter divisions are helpful but they can disconnect us from the context. In 3:1-14 Paul warns these believers about Jewish legalists who denounce the gospel and instead promote Jewish traditions. Paul says ‘been there, done all that’; doesn’t work. Doesn’t save you. Yes, trusting in Jesus alone will result in people giving you a hard time but that’s okay. Suffering for Jesus is worth it because of the prize of which awaits us in heaven. In 4:1 he’ll say,

“Therefore, my brothers and sisters you whom I love and long for, my joy and my crown, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord dear friends.

“Therefore” points back to something he just said in Ch.3 that will help us stand firm when people give us a hard time for following Jesus. Look at 3:15

*¹⁵ All of us, then, who are mature should take such a **view** of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. ¹⁶ Only let us live up to **what we have already attained**.*

¹⁷ Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, **keep your eyes** on those who live as we do. ¹⁸ For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹ Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. **Their mind is set on earthly things.** ²⁰ But our citizenship is **in heaven.** And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be **like his glorious body.** Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends!

So this things above mindset is integral to our persevering by faith.

We Always Need to Stand Firm in the Lord **(4:1)**

When we feel the pressure of sin and temptation around us Paul encourages us to stand firm. Take note of your surroundings. How has God equipped you now (Holy Spirit power) but also what do we already have promised for us that we can't see yet?

We are citizens of heaven awaiting glorification (3:20-21)

Paul pressed on looking forward to the heavenly prize, the upward call of God in glory. Jesus has the power to bring everything under His control. If the world seems out of control, Jesus isn't. He's not surprised when oil prices go up or lettuce prices go crazy! He's not unsettled by the Putins of the world. He's biding His time for that day when He'll return and put an end to all sinfulness. Their minds are set on earthly things so we need to keep our minds on heavenly things. We can stand firm now because what we have is firmly in store for us. We "are" citizens of heaven (present tense) so lets live like we are (last year's theme).

Philippians has often been called a letter of joy because Paul talks about it so much in his letter – even though there is some joylessness going on. Joy is relational not situational. Joy is the peaceful calm that God's in control and He's got my life in His hands no matter what. So this is another way we stand firm:

Be confident in joy, resisting godless influences (3:17-19; 4:1; 1:27)

Paul says in 3:17 follow my example not the godless example of the hopeless around us. Their minds are set on earthly things whereas our mind should be set above. Paul says you are my joy and my crown. The word for crown was the Greek term for the prize at the 'Olympic games' of his day. Believers in Christ are my joy and my gold medal. We've all watched the Olympics. We get pretty excited when a Canadian wins a gold. Our common identity unites us. That's what Paul is getting at here because he's going to address some disunity in the body of Christ.

We're a body. We're united in Christ. We're all going to get God's gold medal one day; transformed bodies and sinless minds living in peace for eternity in Jesus and God's presence. The godless influences around us don't compare to the godly rewards awaiting us. And we have peace and joy now because of this.

Paul reminds them of all these things before he addresses the 'problem'

I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord. ³ Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow [my true companion], help these women since they have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.

What's the main point Paul wants us all to get when we're not getting along with another believer?

If We're United to Jesus We Should be United with our Fellow Followers **(4:2-7)**

Paul graciously appeals to both of them separately. He chooses no sides, so it's not a theological issue otherwise he would make a ruling. They had different opinions of personal preferences about ministry most likely. We all do. Doesn't make us right or wrong. Doesn't make us more or less mature. Dwelling on them and not allowing others to have their personal preferences will lead to division. Paul says you need to agree in Jesus and not let this minor issue divide you and the church. Because if two people adamantly disagree they will want others to take sides with them. They'll talk amongst themselves and avoid others who disagree. Excuse me, why are we even here? To worship God and grow in Christlikeness, not our likeness. We need to agree in the Lord

For effective ministry (vv.2-3)

He reminds these two women you've both stood up for Jesus and shared in ministry with me together. Along with someone named Clement and this unnamed companion and many others. Your names are all written in the book of life. Why are you divided over an issue that isn't Jesus centered, its you centered? Then he says,

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! ⁵ Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.

Gentleness is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said 'I am gentle and humble'. Paul's saying

Serve others like Jesus (vv.4-5)

Again note the rejoicing/joy theme continuing. If you are enjoying the Lord how can you be at odds with anyone? Joy in the Lord is our strength (Neh. 8:10). Our security in God keeps us hopeful, joy-filled and willing to forgive. I think that's what Paul is getting at. The opposite of gentle is harsh. Divisive people are harsh. Gentleness is willing to overlook hurts, forgive and serve. Jesus washed the disciples' feet knowing they would all desert Him. He even washed Judas' feet. Let your gentleness, your forgiving spirit, your servant attitude be evident to your fellow believers and the unbelievers you rub shoulders with. The Lord is near. Meaning; your assessment day is coming. 2 Cor. 5:10 says we'll all stand at the judgment seat of Christ. The judgment seat of Christ is for believers where Jesus will reward us for the good we did as His followers. The great white throne judgment of God mentioned in Rev. 20 is for unbelievers, who all will be thrown in the lake of fire because they tried to justify themselves by their works.

Jesus is coming back. Eternity awaits. The prize of a glorified body is waiting for us. We'll never sin again. So why can't we get along and let go of our personal preferences that cause division?

And if we're trying to protect our little territory or make people agree with our perspective then we're going to create a lot of anxiety in our life because we're trying to control a person or a situation. That's why tells us to be anxious about nothing and pray about everything. If I talk to God about everything then my stress level will come down significantly. Because in prayer we give God control instead of trying to control things ourselves. How much of our own anxiety is a result of a desire to control someone or something? So here's how we become less anxious:

End anxiety through prayer to experience God's peace (4:6-7)

I say end because 'Do not be anxious' literally means stop being anxious. You're anxious about something you can't control. It's stressing you out. It's resulting in a harsh attitude not a gentle one. Have you prayed about it? "Prayer" refers to interceding for others. Have you prayed about the person that you're having trouble with, even if its only in your own mind? 'Petition/supplication' refers to urgent needs, definitely things we would be anxious about. 'With thanksgiving' refers to attitude. How can you stay angry at someone when you pray for them and thank God for them. Paul began this letter thanking God for the Philippian believers, fellow partners in the gospel with whom God is going to complete the good work He's doing in them.

Perhaps we should stop trying to be God and pressuring people to be like we think they should be (assuming we are correct). God saved them. He'll conform them to Jesus in His time and way. If we remember to pray like this our anxiety levels will drop considerably. Because when we do this we get God's peace, God's shalom. What's the peace of God? Complete contentment and rest in His power, will and timing. When we pray to God about the things we're anxious about we'll probably see them differently too. Like, why am I anxious about this? God's peace surrounds our hearts like an army of soldiers protecting their assigned person or group.

And prayer definitely helps. But my sin nature raises its ugly head again and reminds us of what we're annoyed about or worried about. What we're trying not to control. So Paul turns to some helpful mind ideas. If we're to set our minds on things above what should we be thinking about? And he lists a number. Why?

Because Right Thinking Leads to Right Living (4:8-9)

"Let your mind 'dwell', stop, focus, set, on things that are true, honorable, right, pure, lovely and of a good report'. But when we worry its usually about something that isn't true yet and may never be. If I'm criticizing someone in my mind that isn't honoring. If I'm judging someone whose motives I don't know, that's not right or just. If I entertain immoral thoughts that's not pure. If I'm thinking about things that only concern myself then that's not pleasing to God. If I'm thinking envious or jealous thoughts, that isn't commendable or build anyone up.

What do we let consume our thoughts? (v.8)

When these kinds of negative thoughts come into our mind we need to identify them for the sin that they are and replace it with what's true, noble, right, pure, etc. Someone has said, 'I can't prevent a bird from flying over my head but I can keep him from building a nest on my head.' In other words, I can't completely keep negative thoughts from crossing my mind but I don't have to dwell on them. Let your mind dwell on these good things Paul said.

And then he adds in v.9

⁹ *Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.*

Put into practice the teachings of God's Word. That's what Paul taught. That's how he lived. So what are we practicing?

Are my practices a window into my thoughts? (v.9)

Harsh words, disobedience, uncaring attitudes and absence of servanthood shows people that we're not thinking things above. We're not meditating on the truth of who we are in God together.

Did Euodia and Syntyche ever reconcile? We don't know. But we can write the ending of our own disagreements, petty differences, judgmental attitudes. How? By remembering who we are in Christ. "The Things above". What we have promised to us and the other believer has as well. Glorified bodies and sinless minds. God's responsible for the good work He's doing in them not you or me. So stop trying to control or change someone. Stop trying to get people to see things your way especially when its not really Scriptural. Pray for the person or situation you're anxious about. Write it out. True praying is being transparent with God about your sin and concerns. Jesus said 'Come to Me all who are weary and heavy-laden [because we're carrying this on our own] and I will give you rest.' Right thinking will lead to right, godly thinking.

When we give our concerns to the Lord not only do we have His peace calming our heart and mind, we will also have the God of peace with us (v.9). Isn't He already with us? Yes. But when we live for Him in obedience He gets a chance to do some more work of conforming us more like Jesus, giving people a chance to see God actively working in us. And Lord-willing they'll see the hope and joy that we have in spite of difficult circumstances and ask us 'How come you are so joyful when you have all this turmoil in your life?'

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please
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