

## **PHILIPPIANS: Picture Joy**

August 18: **Guard Your Hearts:** Philippians 4:2-9

*2 I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. 3 Yes, and I ask you, 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 co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.*

Intro: This church is the very picture of unity as they crowd around the reader of this letter. They may be in a home or in a rented space. But they are pressed together on all sides of the Reader as it is read for the first time. They look like an office staff watching YouTube video.

I am confident this READING is INTERACTIVE. Surely people are oo-ing and aw-ing and amen-ing and that's right!-ing. They do not have the information or entertainment of radio or television or the internet or movies or magazines or even newspapers. Most of them cannot read. The arrival of this letter is a rare and exciting moment.

Euodia hears her name, let's out a little gasp, then looks around and shrugs her shoulders, palms up as if to say, "What can I do?" Syntyche gives a bit of a scream, puts her hand over her mouth, and slowly pulls her shawl over her head. Clement jumps off his bench at the sound of his name and does a fist pump, then responds, "You're the man, my friend!"

Well, these co-workers Paul mentions were probably hoping for a personal shout-out from the Apostle. Being mentioned by name in a letter of Paul's is the next best thing to immortality. They are disappointed he does not give their names. Their names, you see, are written in the book of life but not in this letter.

Euodia and Syntyche are very prominent in this church, we would assume. Everybody knows them. They are likely horrified that their conflict has reached the ears of the Apostle in Rome. And they will have a word with Epaphroditus or Timothy or whoever decided to make them the subject of a conversation with the chained Apostle.

Their dispute, after all, is not about theology. They are both faithful believers. Neither has been involved in scandalous, sinful behavior. Paul would have mentioned that. No, they are in conflict over what to wear to church or how to serve communion or who decides what. And Paul is quite clear:

**I. Make Peace a Priority: *I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord* (v2)**

### A. Don't Endanger Your Heart.

1. Paul is pleading. He is not too proud to beg. In verse 4:1 he addresses this church as "brothers and sisters." He adds, "You whom I love and long for, my joy and crown."

2. These women are important to him. He wants them to find common ground "in the Lord." He has just told them, "Stand firm in the Lord." Jesus Christ is the King. Very diverse people can agree that Jesus is Lord, that he deserves their ultimate allegiance.

3. They do not have to agree on everything else or maybe even much of anything else: Democrat and Republican, Jew and Gentile, mission versus theology, premillennial versus amillennial. They could even be divided over a civil matter, a lawsuit.

4. This may be a personality conflict between these two strong-willed women. He addresses them both, pleads with both.

B. Don't Divide over Trivia. In the economy of Paul, Christ is all and in all, and everything else is way down at the bottom of the list. He would say that the Euodia and Syntyche are conflicted over issues that do not matter. They have no eternal value. They are not related to the gospel or life in Christ.

1. Some people are "enemies of the cross of Christ." Sometimes we are standing our ground because the gospel is threatened, as Paul has just plainly said.

2. But fighting over Trivia is the standard way that Christians split up into camps in my experience.

C. Don't Divide over Stubbornness. Stand firm in the Lord, not in your opinion. This conflict could simply be a contest of wills. And yet it is wounding the church.

D. Help these women. They are prominent women, leaders in the church, co-laborers with Paul in the gospel.

1. He calls upon his “true companion” to help them. I think this is Epaphroditus, but we do not know for sure. The word is used to describe the bonds of marriage as well as friendship. Some people think that Paul had a wife in Philippi who was a godly woman and part of this church.

2. Paul indicates that these women have “contended at my side in the cause of the gospel” (v3). A single reference in Luke 8:2 informs us that Jesus and the disciples had “some women were helping to support them out of their own means.” The women are named along with a few comments about them. The church of Jesus Christ has from the very beginning depended upon the service and support of godly women as well as men.

E. Their names are written in the book of life. They are all true believers, as far as Paul is concerned. He cannot see this book of life, but he is sure their names are there. They are all followers of Jesus. They just have to learn to follow him together.

*4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! 5 Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. 6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

## **II. Insist on Joy: Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! (v4).**

A. The Apostle Paul is laying out the way that he lives his life and that we must live our lives.

1. Rejoice works as a command. If we are willing to hear and obey, it changes our lives.

2. Rejoice works regardless of how we feel. It is possible to rejoice even when you are sick and hurting, as Paul and Silas illustrated by singing in the jail in Philippi.

B. We endanger our hearts when we fail to rejoice. We are on some other path when we lose our joy.

\*\*\*We sang a song when I was a boy, “Count Your Blessings.” The first verse says, “*When upon life’s billows you are tempest-tossed, When you are discouraged thinking all is lost, Count your many blessings, Name them one by one, and it will surprise you what the Lord has done.*” **The second verse says,** “*Are you ever burdened with a load of care? Does the cross seem heavy you are called to bear? Count your many blessings, every doubt will fly, and you will be singing as the days go by.*”

C. Rejoicing is the alternative to Worrying: Do not be anxious.

1. You may not feel that you have an alternative—you must be overwrought, given the condition of things.

2. But you actually do have an alternative. It is not an easy exercise of mind and heart. But it is an alternative. You can choose to rejoice instead of worrying.

\*\*\***EXPERIMENT: Smile,** and see how it makes you feel.

D. Prayer and Petition are the solution to worrying.

\*\*\*Aunt Monnie told me just weeks before she died, “Jesus is my best friend. I talk to him all the time.” And she smiled and laughed. She had a merry heart. She was bright in her eyes and her mind right up to the last in part because she knew how to pray. She gave every one of her burdens, big and small, to the Lord.

*8 Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. 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.*

## **III. Think on These Things: Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things (Phil 4:8)**

\*\*\*Jedi Mind trick.

A. This is a **POSITIVE WORD.** God wants you out of the dark thoughts, into the light. **Think about things that bring a smile!**

B. This is a **POSSIBLE WORD.** You have the authority over your thought life, through the Spirit, to be liberated from your fears and anxieties and to focus on the Good God and good things.

C. This is a **PRACTICAL WORD.** You need this right now.

Conclusion: So how is your thought life?