

Contentment: The Peace of God (*Phil 4:5b-7*)

Introduction – The first thing to notice about the topic of the peace of God is that it is beyond understanding. But this doesn't mean that it is unfruitful to consider. It does mean that it is elusive (and that is the experience with contentment for many). The second thing to notice is that the opposite of contentment, anxiousness or worry, is something we are commanded to abstain from. And the final thing to notice is that peace is something, not that we are to guard, but which guards and protects us – this is something we frequently mix up.

Whether you are beginning a new year or a new day, and whether you are entering into a new challenge or slogging through a seemingly eternal trial, the peace of God is able to rule over and in our hearts.

The Lord is At Hand (5b) – The context of this statement does not lend itself to some kind of “end-times” usage. This phrase is also used in Psalm 145:18 where the psalmist is declaring God's unending care upon those who call upon Him in truth. Psalm 145 certainly sets the same context for the verses which follow. The Lord is near; therefore we do not have to be anxious and are commanded not to do so. When we are anxious about anything we are guilty of unbelief. We don't believe the Lord is near nor that He cares for us.

Not To Worry (Matt 6:25-34) – As soon as we enter into this discussion many of us become anxious because we know we are guilty of anxiousness. This is normal, everyday, common temptation – and Jesus has instructed us what to do about it. Look at the birds and at the flowers (vv25-30). What do you see? And what does worry get you? Not an inch to your life (v27). Jesus does not deny that there are real troubles in life (v34) – He is dealing in reality. But He does command us not to worry, because when we do, we sound like the pagans who don't believe in a sovereign, exhaustive, and good heavenly Father. Then, Jesus gives us an order for handling our concerns before the Lord; He follows the pattern of the prayer He taught earlier in the chapter. Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness – which keeps us from making ourselves the center of the universe. All concerns for our needs must come under our central desire to see Christ's kingdom.

Make Your Requests Known (v6) – Just as Jesus taught, so Paul makes clear that the Lord desires to hear all of our concerns – anything that we might be tempted to worry over. Peter teaches the same in 1 Pet 5:7 and tells us why – “because He cares for you.” Can we cast all our cares upon the Lord, or are we in the middle of some kind of cosmic joke? And so, even though it is a very common stumbling block, we must see that we are engaging in a very serious sin when we worry, when we murmur and complain against God, and when we do not come to Him with our pleas. Two commandments then: first, do not worry; second, make your concerns known to Him.

Begin With Thanksgiving – Giving thanks is not something you teach your children to do only when they feel like it; and the same goes for all of us with God. “Father, thank you for this....” This is what Jesus did when He took the bread and broke it with His disciples; He gave thanks. Thanksgiving reflects our statement of faith; it protects us from idolatry and futile thinking (Rom 1:21). It protects us from distrusting God when the answers that follow are not what we had in mind.

The Promise of Peace (v7) – Keep your commandments and promises straight here. This is not a command; we are not to guard the peace of God. The peace of God is promised to us; and that contentment guards our hearts and minds (our deepest allegiances and the ways that we see the world around us) through Christ Jesus. And this peace is of the kind that passes understanding – it is beyond us. It is the kind of peace that says, “*if God is for us, who can be against us...*” Those who do not have this peace will wonder how your heart and mind are able to withstand the blows around you. In fact, there will be times that you will wonder yourself.

Contentment is a gift of God – It is the manifestation of His grace, sufficient for all our needs. Peace is the fruit of the Holy Spirit indwelling us. It is beyond our understanding as we are transformed more and more into the likeness of Jesus Christ.

Getting Contentment – Take all your cares and concerns to God in prayer. Do so, confessing your discontent and grumbling. Offer your requests with biblically-informed thanksgiving regardless of your emotions. Use the psalms to teach you how to cry and pray and petition and shout to God.

Postscript: God gives grace, like contentment, only in daily portions. He gives grace like manna. If you seek to store up enough for tomorrow, it will rot. But He does give a bounty of grace for today – His mercies are new every morning.