

Philippians XXV – Hard and Glorious Commands (*Phil 4:2-7*)

Introduction – Our understanding of God’s exhaustive sovereignty, His perfect goodness, wisdom, power, and glory, must not end in a Bible study or sermon. It must end in the working out of our salvation in ways that those around us, in and out of the church, are able to see. We must not be simply hearers of the Word, but doers as well.

Agreeing Together (vv2-3) – A division existed in Philippi that, no doubt, was affecting the entire church. These two women had labored alongside Paul in the work of the gospel in Philippi; they may have been among the original women Paul preached to at Lydia’s prayer meeting (Acts 16). He pleads with them to be of the same mind *in the Lord*.

The Problem – We have no idea what the problem was. In God’s wisdom, this seems to provide us with a good lesson; it doesn’t matter what the problem is between two brothers (or sisters). If there is a division, and especially if it is causing public strife, we must seek to be of the same mind *in the Lord*. This is again a reference to the mind we are to have together (2:2, 5). Orthodox belief in the Son of God is not orthodox if it doesn’t work itself out in love.

Harmony and Unity (Eph 4:1-3) – These wonderful blessings in the Lord never come or stay easily. That is why Paul says we must endeavor, strive, work for them. It is painful to address someone when we have been offended. It is difficult to welcome someone’s complaint. It is painful to seek and render godly forgiveness. It is painful to check later that all is well. It is painful to forgive seven times seventy. It is tough to sharpen iron while keeping the bond of peace. No doubt. But, goodness, our names have been written together in the *Book of Life*. And so, like a splinter in the finger, discord must be dug out and removed from the body (Prov 6:19).

Rejoice in the Lord Always (v4) – The commands continue and are connected. The body is to be of the same mind, and the body is to rejoice in the Lord always. The foundation for Christian joy is not and never will be your present circumstances – it is Jesus Christ your Lord. And this means that your lack of joy is not an indication of your external condition. It is rather a sign of your internal condition. Jesus Christ is the source of such joy (1 John 1:4) and therefore it is the duty of the man who is in Christ (Psalm 103:1). And rejoicing is not something that one does only down in one’s heart. The word means to celebrate and carries with it a requirement of external saluting, greeting, acknowledging the object of your rejoicing. A planned, organized, orchestrated celebration for the body of Christ is what Paul has in mind.

Always? – Yes, the word means always or at all times, that is, in every circumstance. This joy is not a denial of sorrow in this world (2 Cor 6:10), but it is a deep joy which goes beyond our ability to express, explain, or fully understand (1 Pet 1:8).

A Big-Hearted Community (v5a) – Related to such celebration is the command to *let your gentleness be known to all men*. Our celebration in the Lord is to be expressed with the graciousness, the forbearance, the big-heartedness of the One we celebrate. These graces are not displayed when we are treated well, but rather when we are mistreated. When Paul describes love as that which ‘suffers long,’ we see that love is displayed when one has to suffer as opposed to when all is going well. “...*be known to all men...*” This is to characterize our community to the greater world around us.

Christ’s Unending Care (vv5b-6) – With Psalm 145:18 in mind, Paul moves to another hard command; we must never be anxious, for the Lord is near. Here is the blunt truth: unbelieving worry is always a sin. Our health, our job, our children, our death, our punctuality, our finances, our spouse or lack thereof – we are to be anxious for nothing. Jesus spoke to the same issue and just as strongly in Matt 6:25ff. To be anxious in present circumstances is to look like unbelievers.

Make Your Requests Known – Or read 1 Peter 5:7. Can we cast all our cares upon God because He really does care for us? Or is He in the business of some kind of cosmic joke? And so we see we must stop this sin, see how wicked it is, even though it is a very common temptation. God invites us to pour out our hearts before Him with every concern.

With Thanksgiving – Our protection from idolatry and futile thinking is thanksgiving (Rom 1:21). This also protects you from distrusting God when His answers or plans are not what you had in mind. In addition, thanksgiving is something which should be external and with or without emotion – just like you teach your children to always say thank you.

The Promise of Peace (v7) – Peace, another fruit of the Spirit, should be much more than some inner feeling. This peace is something that God gives (see also Isaiah 26:3), and it is a peace that goes beyond understanding of the external circumstances – it doesn’t make sense to the unbeliever, and it doesn’t even make sense to us unless we rest in God’s sovereign control. It is this peace that allows us to say, “If God is for us, who can be against us...” (Rom 8:31ff). And it will guard your heart and mind in Christ Jesus.