

# Unity and Joy in the Gospel

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Preacher: Shawn Woo

[ 0 : 00 ] Welcome to our worship service this evening. For those of you who are new, my name is Sean. I'm one of the pastors of Trinity Cambridge Church, and it's my joy and privilege to preach God's word to you this evening.

We've been in the series in the Book of Philippians, and we're in the last chapter now, the first nine verses. I usually have a wireless mic, but the mic was not where it was supposed to be this evening, so I'll be using the handheld mic.

Let me pray and seek God's help. Heavenly Father, we live in a world where people are desperately longing for your peace.

Grant us, Lord, to be peace proclaimers, peacemakers.

Those who invite others to the peace that we have with you and with one another. And give us an ever greater measure of that peace in Jesus Christ, we pray.

[ 2 : 00 ] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Philippians 4, verses 1 to 9. Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.

I entreat Iodia, and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women who have labored 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.

Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand.

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your mind in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

[ 3 : 30 ] But you have learned and received and heard and seen in me. Practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you. This is God's holy and authoritative word.

In its analysis of the things that people searched for on its search engine in the year 2020, Google noted that a search for peaceful or relaxing music, relaxation, meditation, breathing exercises, how to calm down, and inner peace were trending at all time high levels.

Due to the pandemic, as well as the societal turmoil and political divisiveness, people were facing high stress and anxiety and seeking respite from them.

And in our passage today, Paul assures us that we can find relational peace, verses 1 to 5, inner peace, verses 6 to 7, and the God of peace, ultimately, in verses 8 to 9.

But in order to do so, we must rejoice in Christ. And because only those who rejoice in Christ will know God's peace. That's the main point of this passage.

[ 4 : 43 ] So let's look at verses 1 to 5 first, relational peace. In verses 1 to 3, Paul addresses the need for peace and unity within the church. Because as Jesus said in Matthew 12, 25, every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand.

If the church of God is to stand, it must not be divided against itself. As we've seen throughout our series in the letter to the Philippians, this was one of the main concerns driving Paul to write this letter.

The Philippian believers were facing external pressures and persecutions, as well as internal divisions, probably in part prompted by these external pressures. And they were characterized, it says in chapter 2, verse 3, by selfish ambition and conceit.

They were characterized by grumbling and disputing, chapter 2, verse 14. And because of this, Paul said earlier in chapter 1, verse 27, Stand firm.

He returns to those exact exhortations here in chapter 4, verses 1 to 3. He tells them to stand firm, and he tells them to labor side by side in the gospel.

[ 6 : 13 ] Paul also tells Iodia and Syntyche in particular to agree in the Lord, which is literally have the same mind in the Lord, which was the command he gave in chapter 2, verse 2, complete my joy by being of the same mind.

And Paul says this because he knew that the Philippian church could not stand firm in the Lord without having the same mind in the Lord. He singles out two women in particular, Syntyche and Iodia, as objects of this entreaty.

And it's remarkable that Paul names them here. This is not in order to shame them. When condemning his opponents, the enemies of the cross, Paul leaves them unnamed.

That was a common feature of polemical writing in the ancient world, where by refusing to dignify your opponent by naming them, you are actually marginalizing their point of view.

So by naming them here, he's not trying to shame them, but rather he's naming them because they are his friends. Iodia and Syntyche. And he says of them in verse 3, these women have labored side by side with him in the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life, Paul says.

[ 7 : 25 ] So then these women are cherished co-laborers who share a deep history with Paul. And because they are his friends and sisters in Christ, and likely because their conflict was already known among the Philippian church, Paul dignifies Iodia and Syntyche by entreating them personally by name.

The names don't tell us much except that their names mean roughly success or good fortune, so it tells us what their presumably pagan parents wanted for their daughters.

But a better fortune than they could have imagined had come to them in that Iodia and Syntyche had become Christians, and their names were now written in the book of life, the book that records the names of those who will have eternal life with God.

In spite of this, however, the two women had fallen into a contentious disagreement that required a mediator, a third party. So Paul says in verse 3, Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women.

We can't verify with certainty the identity of this true companion, but since he is a recipient of the letter, it's probably not Timothy or Epaphroditus who are with Paul at the time of the writing.

[ 8 : 44 ] But one leading candidate that emerges after ruling out some of the obvious ones is Luke, the author of the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts. We know that Luke was a trusted companion of Paul from the book of Acts.

There are sections in the book of Acts, which is written by Luke, where Luke uses the first person plural pronoun, we, indicating that he was present with Paul in some of his missionary journeys.

And there's a wee passage in Acts 16, 11 to 18, when Paul's in Philippi. And that brings Luke to Philippi. But then the wee passages leave off and then it doesn't come back until six years later in Acts 20, verses 1 to 16, when Paul returns to Philippi, which suggests that Luke was left in Philippi to provide some oversight and leadership for the church there.

And if this reconstruction is correct, Paul's asking Luke, as his trusted companion, true companion, to intervene and help Iodia and Syntyche to agree in the Lord.

And since they're told to agree in the Lord, it doesn't seem like their disagreement was of a personal nature, but something that pertained to standing firm in the Lord and laboring side by side in the Gospel together.

[ 10 : 02 ] Sometimes, differences in theology or in philosophy of ministry can divide genuine, faithful Christians. But we should seek unity in the faith, as Paul enjoins Syntyche and Iodia to do here.

Theologian D.A. Carson was once part of the World Evangelical Fellowship, which brought theologians together from various denominations in different parts of the world in order to hash over various points of disagreement.

And recalling that time, D.A. Carson says that he was always pleasantly surprised by just how much agreement they could reach when Christians who are submitted to the authority of God's Word and are trained in sound interpretive principles humbly listen to and talk to one another in pursuit of

truth.

Especially when the disagreement pertains to gospel priorities, as it appears to do here, we should strive to have the same mind with each other, the same orientation, the same priorities.

Because if we don't share these things, the disagreement impedes the progress of the gospel. In the sport of rowing, the boat does not make much forward progress if the rowers are all rowing at their own pace and rhythm.

[11:26] Only when all the rowers are in sync and they are catching and pulling at the same time and in the same cadence is the boat powerfully propelled forward.

And a crew is able to attain that kind of unity only by following the stroke the rower seated closest to the stern of the boat. Every rower behind him looks to him and his pace.

Likewise, every Christian is to look to Christ, our head. Sync ourselves with his priorities, his purposes. Every Christian is to strive to have Christ's mindset, doing nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility counting others more significant than yourselves.

That's what Paul is entreating Eodia and Syntyche to do. And he appeals to the deep mutual affection he shared with the Philippian church in order to get them to comply. He says to them in verse 1, My brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.

Paul's being quite effusive here. He's been saying all along that he rejoices in Christ and in the progress of his gospel. And he said in chapter 3, verse 14, that he's pressing on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

[12:49] He's striving for Christ who is his prize. The perfect knowledge of and union with Christ. That's what Paul is striving for. And here, he tells us again that the Philippians spiritual well-being, their perseverance in the faith is intimately tied to his goal, his welfare.

He says that the Philippian church is his joy and crown. In all his striving for the prize, he says, if you do not persevere in faith, Paul says, then my labor would have been in vain.

So stand firm in the Lord, my beloved. And he reminds them that Iodia and Syntyche are women who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together, Paul says. And if they have labored side by side with me, then they can labor side by side with each other.

In the same way, you faithfully served alongside me, serve alongside each other. We are on the same team. We are people whose names are in the book of life.

So I plead with you, he's saying, complete my joy by being of the same mind. Continuing in verses four to five, Paul tells us more specifically how we are to attain such unity.

[14:06] He says, rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand. The key to unity in the church is joy in Christ.

Paul is repeating what he commanded earlier in chapter three, verse one. Rejoice in the Lord. Paul speaks frequently of rejoicing in the book of Philippians and nearly all of those instances refer to rejoicing in Christ or in his gospel.

And so that means Christian joy is located in Christ, his person and his work. Paul unpacked this in chapter three and told us that rejoicing in Christ entails putting no confidence in the flesh, in our own righteousness, but instead boasting in and trusting in Christ alone.

It's when we are rejoicing in Christ, when we are glorying in Christ and not in ourselves, that we can humble ourselves before others and pursue unity. And Paul says that we should rejoice in the Lord always.

This is what George Mueller describes in his autobiography this way. quote, I saw more clearly than ever that the first great and primary business to which I ought to attend every day is to have my soul happy in the Lord.

[15:29] This is the Christian's business each and every day. We are commanded to rejoice in the Lord, not sometimes, but always.

Unless we miss the importance of this command, Paul says it again. Again, I will say, rejoice. It's easy to rejoice when we're getting straight A's in school, when we have a vibrant social life, when we're healthy, when our spouses are patient and supported, when our children are behaving, when we're getting promotions at work.

But what about when we're failing classes and being ostracized by our peers? What about when we're sick, when marriage is rocky and children are rebellious, when we're unemployed and seemingly unable to get a job, when we lose our loved ones to an untimely death?

Can we rejoice? The answer is yes. Why? Because the joy that Paul's talking about is not located in these circumstances, but in Christ who is unchanging.

This doesn't mean that we become immune to setbacks or disappointments and tragedies, nor does it mean that we become callous to feeling. Our circumstances can certainly make our lives much, much harder.

[16:57] But even when a pandemic rests, our social life, our health, our loved ones, our hobbies, our routines, and even our very lives from us, it cannot take Christ from us.

And in this we can rejoice. In one of his books, John Flavel, the 17th century English pastor, writes about a Christian convert who renounced his nobility and wealth to give himself wholly to Christ. He says this, I have read that when the Duke of Condie had entered voluntarily into the incomities of a religious poverty, he was one day espied and pitied by a lord of Italy who out of tenderness wished him to be more careful and nutritive of his person.

The good Duke answered, Sir, be not troubled and think not that I am ill provided of inconveniences, for I send in a harbinger before me who makes ready my lodgings and takes care that I be royally entertained.

The Lord asked him who was his harbinger. He answered, The knowledge of myself and the consideration of what I deserve for my sins, which is eternal torments.

[18:16] And when with this knowledge I arrive at my lodging, how unprovided soever I find it, methinks it is ever better than I deserve. Despite the loss of the conveniences and luxuries of his former life, when the Duke of Condie kept his knowledge of his former life as an unregenerate sinner and object of God's wrath who is destined to be punished in eternal hellfire, when he realized that that's who he formerly was but that's what he was rescued from, he could not help but conclude that his conditions were better than what he deserved.

And so instead of being filled with self-pity and complaints, he was filled with gratitude. In other words, this man was rejoicing in Christ, in the saving work of Jesus Christ and this put everything else in his life in proper perspective.

It's easy to feel that our difficult circumstances are the most pressing things in our own lives. But suffering does not have the power to separate us from God.

In fact, if we let it, suffering can drive us closer to God. But sin, our pride and unbelief can separate us from God forever.

And that is always the most pressing issue in everyone's life. God's life. And Christ has dealt with our sins to the sins of those who trust in him once and for all on the cross.

[20:03] By paying the penalty for our sins in our place, by dying on the cross, by being raised from the dead on the third day, Jesus took selfish, undeserving, insubordinate sinners and reconciled them to God the Father.

And if you are placing all your faith in Jesus Christ and not in your own righteousness for salvation, then you can be assured of this great salvation. And you can rejoice in Christ.

We might object at this point, well, it's easy to talk about rejoicing in Christ. But Paul, do you know how hard my life is? But Paul didn't merely talk about this.

He exemplified it in his life. During his missionary journey in Philippi in Acts 16, Paul was attacked by a mob, stripped naked and beaten with rods and then he was jailed in the inner prison with his feet shackled.

But there, in that prison, without a shred of self-pity, it says Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God while the other prisoners were listening to them.

[21:12] Remember also that Paul wasn't vacationing in Rome sipping fine wine when he wrote this letter. He wrote it while he was under house arrest awaiting his sentence which very well could have been a death sentence.

Imagine for a moment what your state of mind would be in that place. And yet, Paul rejoiced in Christ always. the apostle to the Gentile was also the apostle of joy.

Brothers and sisters, this joy is a distinctive mark of followers of Christ. When unbelievers think of Christians, the faces that come to mind should not be long, somber, angry faces but faces that manifest joy in Christ.

And this rejoicing in the Lord makes us eminently reasonable. Verse 5 says, Let your reasonableness be known to everyone.

The Lord is at hand. The NIV, the New International Version translates the word reasonableness as gentleness. Others translate it as graciousness or forbearance. This word appears in conjunction with other words like peaceable in 1 Timothy 3.3 and alongside words like pure, peace-loving, open to reason, and rich in mercy in James 3.17.

[ 22 : 38 ] It's a word that's often used to describe the kindness, the mercy, and the magnanimity of a ruler. And Paul uses that word in 2 Corinthians 10.1 to describe the meekness and gentleness of Christ himself.

The opposite of this reasonableness would be pettiness, contentiousness, or small-mindedness. In short, this is what Loria and Syntyche needed, reasonableness.

And Christians should be known for this to everyone, not just to our friends, but also to our enemies. Not only toward those who are reasonable and agreeable to us, but also toward those who are unreasonable and quarrelsome.

To everyone. We live in an increasingly polarized culture, and there's a cacophony of noise. There's a lot of pointing of fingers. But even in this climate, Christians should not be known for being strident or contentious, but for being reasonable.

I've been convicted by this this week, brothers and sisters. If you notice that you have been petty, defensive, ungracious, unforgiving, or harsh in your home or on your social media account or whatever context you might be in, examine your heart and ask yourself if you have been rejoicing in the Lord.

[ 24 : 18 ] There are quarrels in our world because our passions are at war within us, as James 4 says.

Because there are unmet desires and these desires become demands and these demands get deified as idols of our hearts in whose service we live. But this should not be for the Christian.

Our deepest desire is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. We already belong to Christ and soon we will be fully united with Him because Christ is our great prize and reward and this Christ will return soon.

That's why we rejoice in the Lord. And those who rejoice in the Lord are characterized by reasonableness. And this is why Paul concludes this thought with the statement, the Lord is at hand.

This is the grounds for our reasonableness and rejoicing. Why we are reasonable. Why we rejoice? Because the Lord is at hand. This statement is a bit ambiguous.

[ 25 : 23 ] It could mean that the Lord is nearby in a spatial sense. But it could also mean that the Lord is near or almost here in a temporal sense. And that His return is imminent.

Both of these statements are true. He's near in both of those senses. Later in verse 9, Paul says, the God of peace will be with you. So God is definitely at hand in the sense of being near us spatially.

When you feel ashamed and guilty, when you feel alone and abandoned, when you feel persecuted and threatened, when you are afraid, when you are sad, God's not observing detachedly from a safe distance.

No, He's with you. He is at hand. During the pandemic, what would normally be considered socially unacceptable behavior or rude has become the norm and commonplace.

Imagine this happening in normal times. I mean, it's humorous to think about. Someone taking a step back every time you take a step forward closer to keep you at a distance, keeping a mask on the whole time as they talk to you.

[ 26 : 44 ] Or, when you need to hand something to them, methodically taking out their latex gloves, putting it on, taking it from you, and then promptly after putting it down, clinically removing the latex gloves and then washing their hands.

sometimes Christians think that that's the way God deals with us.

But that's not the way God deals with us. He had every reason. He has every reason to treat us that way.

He is holy. We are sinful. He is righteous and just. We are not. He is faithful and we are faithless.

And yet, God so loved us, He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to live among us.

He became a man and dwelled among us. He experienced our squalor. He lived among filthy sinners. He embraced and healed lepers. And He touched the untouchables with chronic bleeding problems.

[ 27 : 58 ] God with us. This is why Jesus is called Emmanuel, God with us. He is at hand in your life.

He is with you in your life. In Daniel chapter 3, King Nebuchadnezzar throws Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego into the burning, fiery furnace for refusing to bow down to a gold statue of Himself. But then He is astonished and He rises up in haste and asks His advisors, Did we not cast three men into the fire? But I see four men unbound walking in the midst of the fire and they are not hurt and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods.

The Lord God Himself was in that furnace through His angelic representative. Whatever your furnace might be in life, sickness, depression, loneliness, rejection, poverty, grief, pain, in your feeling of powerlessness and helplessness, remember, the Lord is at hand.

He is with you. But that's not all. Given the eschatological orientation, the end time orientation of the letter to the Philippians, perhaps what Paul has in mind even more immediately is the Lord's imminent return.

[ 29 : 32 ] He's coming back. In chapter 2, verse 16, he urged the Philippians to hold fast, to hold on to the word of life until the day of Christ.

You don't have to hold on for long. Just hold on. He is coming back. In chapter 3, verse 8 to 11, he spoke of suffering the loss of all things in order that by any means possible, he may attain the resurrection from the dead.

In chapter 3, 12 to 21, he spoke of pressing on toward the goal of the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. And he said that he was awaiting from heaven a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body.

Yes, we have lowly bodies now. Yes, we have suffering now. We have persecution now. We fight against the world, the flesh, and the devil every day now.

But hold fast because your Lord is coming. He will redeem you. He will make all things right. He will grant you victory.

[ 30 : 46 ] He will vindicate you. And if we keep that end in view, we can rejoice. We can be reasonable. That's the key to relational peace.

That's the key to peace and unity in the church. Amen. But God also promises us inner peace. Peace within our hearts and minds in verses 6 to 7.

Paul says in verse 6, Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.

This command is categorical. It admits no exceptions. It doesn't say do not be anxious about some things. It's about anything. And that word anything is contrasted with the word everything.

So then the way to be anxious for nothing is to be prayerful in everything. Some of us are so busy and busy-hearted that we don't even know what we're anxious about.

[ 32 : 04 ] We don't even know what's stressing us out, what worries us. So oddly enough, some of us need to slow down long enough to come to grips with our anxieties, our worries, and then bring them to God in prayer.

prayer. And we need to ensure that our prayers are not an expression of our anxiety and a means of controlling our circumstances, but that rather our prayer is an expression of faith and a relinquishing of control over our circumstances.

If we use prayer as a way to rehearse our worries, then we'll just be more worrisome afterward, and we're just talking to ourselves and not to God. If we're honest with ourselves, in our broken and sinful world, we do not have a shortage of things to worry about.

All you need to do is turn on the TV, read a page of the newspaper, and then we are warned about global hunger, endangered species, melting ice caps, COVID-19, cultural decline of the West, the ascent of communism and authoritarianism overseas, digital hacking and identity theft, political upheaval, economic recession, and societal moral decay.

And that's not even getting to the more personal issues, how you'll have to pay for your broken car, what you will do when your husband is deployed overseas, whether you'll get a job or not, whether you'll get a visa or not, your declining health, turbulent marriage, your children's salvation, their future, their education, rock you in relationships with in-laws.

[ 33 : 56 ] I can go on and on. These are all legitimate worries. We worry because we might lose what we value.

And that threat is very real. It's not imagined. But nevertheless, as children of God, we need not worry.

Because Jesus assures us in Matthew 6 that our Father, our Heavenly Father cares for us and provides for us. And because, as this passage says, we can bring all our petitions to God who hears us.

we need not worry because we trust that God is in control when humanity clearly has no control over either their environment or themselves.

Do you, brothers and sisters, let your requests be made known to God in everything by prayer and supplication? Do you take stock of what you're worried about and then explicitly, not in some vague generalities, but specifically, do you bring those things to God?

[ 35 : 11 ] Do you earnestly, not haphazardly, in a few hurried minutes, but at length, do you talk to God about your fears and anxieties? When we talk about our troubles with our best friends or with our counselors, we spill our guts in front of them.

But do you do that with God? And if not, why not? He wants to hear. He wants to listen. He wants to help.

He wants to care for you and provide for you. And our prayer should be accompanied by thanksgiving.

This is not thanksgiving in anticipation of what God's going to do in response to our prayers, but the basic posture of thanksgiving that we should have every single time we pray.

Thanksgiving is an acknowledgement of our creatureliness before God. It's an acknowledgement that we receive from Him, that all that we have, we receive from Him, not as an entitlement or a wage we have earned, but as a gift from the generous Father.

[ 36 : 27 ] That's why thanksgiving suits us as His creatures. Romans 1, 21, 22 describe the refusal to give thanks to God as the first step toward idolatry.

This is true because those who refuse to acknowledge their creatureliness before God and worship the Creator have nothing left but to turn to the worship of creatures. these three commands, rejoice, pray, and give thanks, occur again and again throughout the Psalms and often occur together. Psalm 95, verse 2, let us come into His presence with thanksgiving. Let us make a joyful noise to Him with songs of praise. Psalm 97, 12, rejoice in the Lord, O you righteous, and give thanks to His holy name.

We find this triad in the New Testament also. Romans 12, 12 says, rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. And perhaps the best known example of them all, 1

Thessalonians 5, 16 to 18, rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

This is the posture that we should seek to have before God each day. This is actually a great accountability question we could ask one another. Instead of just asking, hey, how are you?

[ 37 : 54 ] That's a good question too if we're willing to answer it honestly. But we could also ask one another, how have you been rejoicing in Christ lately? How grateful have you been lately?

How's your prayer life? And if we humble ourselves before God and do these three things, verse 7, promise us, and the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

there are situations where our anxiety is primarily caused by something that is disordered in our bodies, whether it's a hormonal imbalance after giving birth or something else.

But usually, anxiety is primarily caused by a disordered heart and a disordered mind. but as we rejoice in the Lord and as we pray to God with thanksgiving, our minds and hearts get reordered and we're filled with the peace of God which surpasses understanding.

This is a wonderful assurance. There are situations in life where we can't possibly imagine having peace. but that's okay because the peace that God promises us here is one that surpasses our understanding.

[ 39 : 24 ] It goes beyond our imagination. Inner peace is possible even under the most turbulent circumstances. And the kind of peace that is in due here is attained not by some psychological technique or mental jiu-jitsu but it is given by God.

And it says this peace will guard our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus. It's a wonderful image.

The word guard is a military term used to refer to a garrison that stands guard at the city to protect it from enemies.

This would have been a particularly vivid metaphor because Paul is under house arrest. He literally has guards that are keeping a watch on him and making sure that he can't go and come as he pleases.

That's what the peace of God does at our hearts in our minds to keep what goes in and what comes out.

He keeps us. He protects us. Proverbs 4:23 says Keep your heart with all vigilance for from it flow the springs of life. Our actions in life flow from our heart.

[ 40 : 40 ] And if our heart is besieged by anxiety our lives will be busy frantic and joyless. But if we rejoice in Christ and prayerfully entrust ourselves to him his peace will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

But peace is not something external to God that he gives to us. Rather we experience this peace as we walk in relationship with the God of peace.

That's what verses 8 to 9 is about. Finally brothers whatever is true whatever is honorable whatever is just whatever is pure whatever is lovely whatever is commendable if there is any excellence if there is anything worthy of praise think about these things what you have learned and received and heard and seen in me practice these things and the God of peace will be with you.

There are two main admonitions here. Verse 8 says think about these things and verse 9 says practice these things. Paul is getting extremely practical here.

Only those who rejoice in Christ will know God's peace and in order to rejoice in Christ we're going to have to think about and practice the right things. In Matthew 5 Jesus makes the connection that being hatefully angry with someone is tantamount to murder and that lusting after someone is tantamount to committing adultery with him or her in his heart.

[ 42 : 05 ] Jesus makes those connections because hate filled anger is the seed in the mind from which murder grows because lust is the seed in the mind from which adultery grows.

This is why it is imperative that we take every thought captive to obey Christ. What you fill your mind with is incredibly important. What kind of TV shows or movies are you watching?

What kind of books are you reading? What kind of examples are you following? What does your mind wander to? What is the content of your daydreams?

What are you thinking about? As a Canadian American motivational speaker puts it humorously, you are not what you think. You are not what you think you are, but you think, but what you think you are.

in the context of Proverbs chapter 4 verse 23, which I quoted earlier, keep your heart with all vigilance, there is a connection to verse 21, which is keep my words within your heart.

[ 43 : 16 ] The implication is that the way we keep our hearts is to keep God's word in our hearts. Psalm 119 verse 11 makes that explicit. I have stored up your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.

So then one of the ways that we are called to rejoice in Christ, the incarnate word of God, is to think about and fill our minds with the inscripturated word, the written word of God.

Turn it over and over and over again in our minds. Remind ourselves of it. Think about it. Read it. Memorize it. Meditate on it. Talk to others about it.

Christian meditation in this way differs significantly from popular meditative methods nowadays. Hindu meditation focuses on a repeated sound or a part of the body.

Buddhist meditation tries to banish all thoughts from one's mind. All these eastern religions which are becoming increasingly popular here in the west seek to empty one's mind.

[ 44 : 22 ] But Christian meditation is about filling your mind. It reminds me of the home science experiment that I did with one of my daughters.

When you take an empty bottle of water and submerge it straight down into a tub full of water, because the bottle is full of air, the water actually doesn't get inside.

water is only when you tilt the bottle slightly so that there's an opening through which air can leave the bottle that water displaces the air.

It fills the bottle. The only way to empty the bottle of air is to displace it with something else. You can't simply empty it without filling it with something else.

Our minds are the same. the only way to empty our minds of evil things is to displace them by filling them with good things.

[ 45 : 27 ] But Paul's not speaking exclusively of meditating and memorizing scripture here. He intentionally uses broad categories of virtuous things that were commonly enjoyed in Greco-Roman moral teachings.

He says, finally brothers, whatever is true, not things that are false, but whatever is consistent with God's truth, with God's word, which is truth, whatever is consistent with the gospel of truth, think about these things.

Whatever is honorable, not what is despicable or contemptible, but whatever is worthy of praise, whatever is noble, whatever is worthy of respect, think about these things.

Whatever is just, another translation says, whatever is right, not what sinners, sinful humanity says is right or just, but what God says is right, what God says is just, think about these things, whatever is pure, not things that are tainted or sordid, but whatever is unblemished, whatever is pure and innocent, think about these things, whatever is lovely, not things that are ugly and unpleasant, but whatever is beautiful, whatever is delightful, think about these things, whatever is commendable, not things that should be condemned or denounced, but whatever is praiseworthy, think about these things, and then the last two phrases sum it all up, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things, and in addition to thinking about these things, we are to practice these things, and we put them into practice by imitating those who have modeled them for us.

verse 9 says what you have learned and received and heard and seen in me practice these things. This is a continuation of Paul's thought from chapter 3 verse 17 where he told the Philippians join in imitating me and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.

[ 47 : 26 ] Because the world is replete with bad examples that seek to lead us astray we need to pay careful attention to those who live cross shaped lives according to the pattern that Christ has set for us.

And if we do that the God of peace will be with you. I began this message by talking about how people all over the world are seeking peace but peace is elusive for them because it cannot ultimately be found apart from the God of peace.

I was once told that in a Christian library put together by a missionary in Southeast Asia one of the most sought out books one of the most frequently borrowed books especially among the Buddhist monks that were there was the book entitled Peace with God by Billy Graham though in appearance these monks demeanor and lifestyle were a picture of perfect peace they lacked true inner peace because they did not have peace with God every single one of us is born in enmity toward God there is hostility between us and God by birth that's the human predicament because our forefather and representative Adam failed us by rebelling against God and Paul describes this condition with three parallel phrases in Romans 5 he says while we were still weak while we were still sinners while we were enemies we were reconciled to

God by the death of his son Ephesians 2 14 says Christ himself is our peace he is called the prince of peace in Isaiah 9 6 because the God of peace so loved us he sent his only son to die for us on the cross so that our guilt might be atoned for and God's wrath righteous wrath might be satisfied and it's only because of Christ that we now have peace with God and it's only by being reconciled to God our father that we have peace with one another as brothers and sisters in Christ so let's be ambassadors of peace ambassadors of reconciliation let's be people who are full of joy and thanksgiving who impart God's peace to those whom they meet because we ourselves have been filled to overflowing by the peace of God let's pray together yes

God we have tasted that peace and we long for it more and more Lord grant us to surrender all to you entrust everything to you in prayer oh Lord use us to proclaim your peace in this world full of unrest in Jesus name we pray amen let I ■■■ me but I this is an ■■■ or woman to other THAT nobody