

## Philippians 4:2-23

- 2 *I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord.*  
 3 *Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women,  
 who have laboured 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.*

v2 Repeated 'I entreat' suggests a serious issue.

Source of division in Philippi?

Names 'Success' and 'Lucky' suggest gentiles; possibly freedwomen.<sup>1</sup>

Also likely 'God-fearers'.

Involvement in public ministry suggest education & social eminence.

Perhaps like the founding member, Lydia, a trader in purple dye.

Possibly household heads?

'Agree in the Lord'

– 2:2–3 'be of the same mind...do nothing out of rivalry or conceit'.

v3 'True yokefellow' – Luke? (Acts 16:11-17; 20:6).

'laboured side by side' (*synēthlēsan*) speaks of their earlier *unity*.

Paul is firm but affirming these women (names in the 'book of life').

4 *Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.*

5 *Let your reasonableness ['forbearance'] be known to everyone.*

*The Lord is at hand;*

Again 'rejoice in the Lord' — 16 times

Find your peace and security through union with the resurrected Jesus

v5 Paul exhorts 'forbearance' in view of their 'rivalry and conceit' (2:3).

'The Lord is at hand' –

either — the nearness of the Second Coming of the Lord (3:20).

or — Ps 145:18 ('the Lord is *near* to those who *call* on him')?

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<sup>1</sup>Note the involvement of women in Paul's mission: Priscilla, Chloe, Phoebe, Mary, Junia, Euodia, Syntyche, Lydia (?).

- 6 *do not be anxious about anything,  
but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving  
let your requests be made known to God.*
- 7 *And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,  
will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*
- v6 ‘anxiety’ means being torn apart  
– the troubles of life in the ancient world  
– churches were illegal associations; economic persecution  
‘prayer and supplication’ rough synonyms  
‘thanksgiving’ is fittingly offered before ‘prayer and supplication’
- v7 ‘the peace of God’ (issues from peace *with* God)  
– cannot be explained by rational means  
– stand as a vigilant sentry guarding our hearts

Our prayers may or may not be answered in the way we expect.  
But God’s promise of his peace to the intercessor is absolute.

- 8 *Finally, brothers and sisters,  
whatever is true,  
whatever is honourable,  
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.*
- 9 *What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me  
—practice these things,  
and the God of peace will be with you.*

Paul achieved the impact by a fivefold repetition of ‘whatever is’,  
followed by his twofold ‘if there is any...’,  
concluded by his own example  
and the promise of the divine presence.

The great cities like Philippi were culturally advanced, with well-designed and carefully constructed public buildings. At the same time the wealthy and powerful kept the lower orders and slaves in their vice-like grip. Slaves who stepped out of line were crucified. People and animals were killed as public entertainment. Superstition was rife. Many people worshipped rocks, believed plants could be deities, owned sacred animals, accepted ritual castration and prostitution. Excessive drinking

was common place and it was believed that the gods spoke through the slurred speech of the inebriated. Paedophilia was common involving young males at symposia (drinking parties).

Inner, biblical values: *whatever is true, honourable, just, pure*

External aesthetic values: *whatever is lovely, commendable*  
(based on moral discrimination)

*if there is any excellence*

*if there is anything worthy of praise*

Paul's exhortation: *think about these things*

*practice these things*

Take Paul as your template:

*What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me do*

(Paul was no grim Philistine)

This is the vocabulary as of a rabbi who invited his disciples to *learn* from the master, but also to *emulate* his total life. Let them recall not only his words but also what manner of man Paul was when present with them.

Paul's self-portrait is of a man whose mind was steeped in biblical values, but who could admire beautiful things and commend praiseworthy people.

Philippians 4:8-9 appears as the motto on the coat of arms of the BBC, which in turn inspired these words on the entrance of Broadcasting House.

*This Temple of the Arts and Muses is dedicated to Almighty God by the first Governors of Broadcasting House in the year 1931, Sir John Reith being Director-General. It is their prayer that good seed sown may bring forth a good harvest, that all things hostile to peace or purity may be banished from this house, and that the people, inclining their ear to whatsoever things are beautiful and honest and of good report, may tread the path of wisdom and uprightness.*

### The Secret of Contentment

- 10 *I rejoiced in the Lord greatly  
that now at length you have revived your concern for me.  
You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity.*
- 11 *Not that I am speaking of being in need,  
for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content.*
- 12 *I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound.  
In any and every circumstance,  
I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance  
and need.*
- 13 *I can do all things through him who strengthens me.*  
Christ strengthens us for life's challenges when we call upon him.

We are concerned about 'what the future holds' but we need to be reminded 'who holds the future'.

Paul the prisoner

Has **joy** in his heart because of his union with Christ  
Has the **peace** of God in his heart  
Knows the secret of **contentment**

- 14 *Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble.*
- 15 *And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only.*

Paul declined payment when founding a church — tentmaker  
But expected that once established the church would pay the minister  
Paul was like a missionary supported by the Philippians

- 16 *Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again.*  
Example of this partnership: at Thessalonica

- 17 *Not that I seek the gift,  
but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit*  
Not a request for money but exhortation to godliness.

- 18 *I have received full payment, and more.  
I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent,  
a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God*  
They sent Epaphroditus as carer + money (to relieve Timothy?)

- 19 *And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.*  
 20 *To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.*  
 Wonderful promise

The Philippians sent Paul money  
 in nearby Thessalonica,  
 to distant Corinth (2 Corinthians 11:9),  
 and now also to far distant Rome.

Money that is sent is a tangible expression of 'fellowship' (*koinōnia*).

- 21 *Greet every saint in Christ Jesus.  
 The brothers who are with me greet you.*  
 22 *All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household.*  
 Paul no longer under 'house arrest'  
 but under trial in or near the Praetorian Barracks.  
 Paul had evidently brought the gospel message to the family of Nero  
 Caesar (wife Poppaea?, servants, children)

- 23 *The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.*

### **Reflection**

1. Paul urged his *true companion* to help these women get over their differences.  
 Jesus: 'Blessed are the peacemakers' (not the troublemakers).
2. He urges, 'rejoice in the Lord always' reminding us that we are eternally secure 'in the Lord', something about which we should actively remind ourselves.
3. Are we anxious? Our Father gives us his peace as we tell him the things about which we are anxious. God's peace surpasses all understanding and will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.
4. There is much that is ugly and unedifying around us.  
 Paul exhorts us to appreciate things of true beauty consistent with God who created all things that he made 'good...very good'.
5. We learn with Paul the secret of God-given contentment learning to commit things and people who generate anxiety to our loving and Almighty Father.

6. Again with Paul we learn to be able to do all things through him who gives us strength.