

Guarding our hearts and minds
Philippians 4:2-9
Neil Foster 12-Aug-2018

Philippians 4:2-9 New International Version (NIV)

²I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. ³Yes, 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.

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

⁸Finally, 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. ⁹Whatever 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.

1. Divisions within the fellowship

- how it hurts when those we have laboured with, seem to have betrayed us!

2. Reconciliation and Mediation

a. The early days of the church at Philippi

b. The problems in the church at Philippi

c. Calling on Euodia and Syntyche

- They are gospel workers, and believers- their names are in “the book of life”
- Interesting to compare with passage about the disciples in Luke 10:17-20:
“Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven”.
- Perhaps Euodia and Syntyche had started to rejoice in their “ministry success” and status, and to forget the fundamental spiritual issues
- To have one’s name written in the book of life is a mark of assurance that one is saved (see Exodus 32:32-33, Ps 69:28, Dan 12:1, Rev 3:5, 13:8 (“the book of life of the Lamb who was slain”), 17:8 and 20:12-15
- But, while Paul has no doubt of their salvation, these sisters seemed to be in deep conflict which may have been putting gospel proclamation in danger
- Paul reminds them of his attitude in 3:13
“Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, ¹⁴I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus”.
- Important point: Paul calls them to be united “in the Lord”- he does not suggest that they should tolerate the false teaching of those who reject the word of God (whom he condemns in ch 3)
- But where there is disagreement over things that are *not* commanded by scripture, Paul says: “settle your differences” and stop focussing on unimportant matters

d. Calling the “true yoke-fellow” to help

- This is so important Paul calls on one of his companions to help- we don’t know who this person was, possibly Luke, who had a long history with the church at Philippi (see Acts 16:10-11, 20:8)

- He is called on to “help” these sisters, to “bring them together” (same word in Lk 5:7)
- In addition, Paul adds other advice to heal the rift between these women

3. Heart issues- Rejoicing and Prayer

a. Rejoicing

- To start with, they should remember to rejoice!
- By rejoicing and “coming together”, their “gentleness” will be made known to the world
 - “gentleness” in v 5 can also be translated “reasonableness”- in direct contrast to “quarrelling” in 1 Tim 3:3, Titus 3:2, and in connection with being “peaceable” and “open to reason” in James 3:17. When two believers are willing to settle a dispute and return to “peace” instead of war- because of their shared joy in the gospel- then that itself constitutes a powerful testimony to unbelievers!
- And “the Lord is near”- his return is imminent, there is work to be done, don’t waste time in foolish quarrels

b. Prayer

- Instead, pray!
- While the verse here applies to all of life, it can be seen to be especially relevant when anxiety leads us to fight with others; instead, we should hand these things over to God
- Where the congregation does this, the “peace of God” will settle over reconciled believers
- Paul is not of course ruling out help from other sources if needed to deal with anxiety, nor is he dealing with the very real medical problem of “anxiety disorder” which may need medicine and counselling

Anxiety disorders can affect a person's spiritual life, and spiritual issues may be interwoven with a person's anxiety, but to say that the person with an anxiety disorder should simply trust God more is like telling the woman with a broken bone that she should just have greater faith, and she will be well. We wouldn't scold or throw out-of-context Bible verses at a person with a broken bone. Why would we do that to a fellow believer who's suffering the torments of an anxiety disorder?¹
- But for all of us, we can bring our worries to God instead of letting them rule our hearts

4. Mind issues- Focussing on what really matters

- Our minds are also involved; we are tempted often to dwell on grievances, but Paul tells us instead to focus on what is admirable and excellent

5. Action- Following Paul’s example

- And for a positive example, see how Paul and the other apostles lived; not that he was perfect (3:12-14), but he was striving in the direction of serving Jesus, not looking back on past wrongs, but striving forward to see the gospel advance in fellowship with others

Conclusion

¹ See <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/lifechallenges/emotional-health/anxiety-disorders-frequently-asked-questions> .