

philippians : putting the gospel first philippians 4v4-23

Philippians is all about putting the gospel – the good news of Jesus Christ and all that means – first in your life. In the final chapter of the book, Paul's big themes of joy and gospel fellowship are brought together in the commands, the thanks and the greetings he concludes with.

verses 4-9

In 4v4, Paul goes back to the command he gave in 3v1, that they should rejoice in the Lord. It's so important, he says it twice! And the effect should be gentleness, which is obvious to all. The nearness of the Lord could mean his nearness to all believers, or it could mean his coming is near. Or it could mean both. Either way, his nearness will bring about gentleness and prevent them from becoming anxious.

Anxiety would stop them being joyful, but Paul knows that he and they can trust God, whatever their situation. Rather than being anxious, which comes about when we depend on ourselves, Paul tells the Philippians to present their requests to God. This applies in every situation, big or small. And they are to pray "with thanksgiving" – there is always something to thank God for, even when asking him for things! The result of replacing worrying with prayer (that is, depending on God and not themselves) will be that the peace of God will guard their hearts and minds.

Following on from this, Paul wants their thoughts and actions to be shaped by the right things. The things they spend their time thinking about and the examples they follow will work their way out in their lives. So Paul tells them to think about, "whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable... excellent or praiseworthy" (v8). If they live like this, they will be following the example Paul had set for them. And as a result, they will know both the peace and the presence of God with them (v9).

verses 10-20

Next, Paul moves on to thank the Philippians for their support. He rejoices because of the gift they sent to him with Epaphroditus (v18, but it is not the gift itself which brought Paul joy. It is the fellowship they demonstrated in sending it which brings him joy. In v11-13, Paul assures them that he would have been content whether or not they had sent their gift. He has learnt to be content in any situation by depending on God (v13). But their gift still brought him great joy. Other churches had not been so generous (v15) – in

fact, the Philippians were the only ones who supported him during his journey to Macedonia. But it is not the money he delights in, Paul repeats again in v17. Rather, he wants them to please God in the way they used their money. They are giving sacrificially, and their gifts to Paul are on offering to God. And Paul is convinced that, just as God has met his needs, He will meet theirs too. Sacrificial giving will not leave them without. Ultimately, the glory goes to God, who supplies all their needs (v20).

verses 21-23

Paul finishes with his greetings, which are a final gesture of the fellowship Christians share. Christians in Rome send their greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar's household. (This is an important detail – Paul is in prison, but many people have heard the gospel through his imprisonment (remember 1v12-13). Now there are Christians in Caesar's household, the most important household in the known world! This is clear evidence of the advance of the gospel, which must have been a great encouragement to the Philippians who were worried about Paul).

He finishes with a simple blessing, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen" (v23). This sums up one of the underlying themes of the whole letter. Paul put the gospel, the good news about the grace of the Lord Jesus, at the centre of his life, and he wanted the Philippians to put it at the centre of theirs. He knew that if they did, it would change everything. So this is more than just Paul saying "good bye" – he wants them to know what it means for the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ to be with their spirit.

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questions

Remember, these are **suggestions** – feel free to add, remove or change them!

for starters - a discussion question to get you going.

Try to sum up Philippians in one sentence, or even in one word. What are the main ideas? What do you think Paul's priorities will be as he signs off his letter?

discover

v4-9

What commands does Paul give the Philippians in these verses?

v10-20

What have the Philippians done for Paul?

v21-23

Who does Paul mention in his closing greetings?

understand

v4-9

How does Paul tell the Philippians they can know the peace of God?

v10-20

Why does the gift from the Philippians bring Paul joy?

v21-23

Why would Paul's closing greetings be an encouragement to the Philippians?

respond

v4-9

What kind of things should you be thinking about? What should you not be thinking about?

v10-20

Do you share Paul's attitude of contentment, regardless of your circumstances? How can you develop this attitude?

v21-23

What does it mean to have "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ... with your Spirit"? Do you know what this is like?

things to ponder - rounding off Philippians

What lessons have you learnt from Philippians over the past 6 studies?

How have you managed to put them into practice? Where have you struggled?

How will Philippians help you to live *and* speak for Jesus at Uni?

Any problems, let me know... gleaney@uccf.org.uk