

“Prayer and the Peace of God” (An Exposition of Philippians 4:6-7)¹

Introduction

In Philippians chapter 4, the Apostle Paul is giving his final instructions in the letter to the church in the city of Philippi. Here he is teaching them (and *us*) about how to **'let our manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Jesus Christ'** (Philippians 1:27). Here he is expanding how we are to **“stand firm . . . in the Lord”** (4:1).

In v.4 he tells us, **“Rejoice in the Lord always.”** And then here in our text, just two verses later, he says, **“Do not be anxious about anything.”** Anxiety or worry seems to be *the polar opposite* of rejoicing in the Lord, and vice-versa. It is hard to rejoice in the Lord when you are anxious and filled with worry. And likewise, if we are rejoicing in the Lord, that makes it much easier not to worry.

Here in these two short verses, Paul tells us the solution for anxiety or worry. And that solution is prayer. The Christian solution to anxiety is not “Don't worry, be happy.” It is “Don't worry – pray!”

Lord willing, we are going to look at three (3) things from our text this morning: **1.) The Problem of Anxiety, 2.) The Power of Prayer, and 3.) The Promise of Prayer**

The Problem of Anxiety

The *first* thing that we see here in our text is *the problem of anxiety*. In v.6 Paul's exhortation to us is simply, **“Do not be anxious about anything”** (or **“Be Anxious for *nothing*”** - NASB). To many of us, that sounds like *a rather tall order*, doesn't it?

We are prone to anxiety and worry. It doesn't take much to make us anxious. John Calvin comments on this verse as follows: “For we are not made of iron, so as to be unshaken by temptations.”²

We are *not* made of iron, although we might pretend otherwise. We might be tempted to think that Paul himself knew nothing of anxiety or worry, but we'd be mistaken. Think of all of the things that Paul suffered in the course of his ministry of the gospel. *He wrote this very epistle from a prison cell!*

Perhaps his own temptations to anxiety or worry are part of the reason Paul was such a man of prayer. He himself tells us that his **“anxiety for the all the churches”** weighed on him (2 Corinthians 11:28).

Think of this – Paul is really presupposing that there will be temptations to anxiety and worry. These are not empty words, written without cause or purpose. He knows that we as believers are not only prone to wander, but prone to worry.

The word for **“anxious”** here has the idea of having your thoughts disturbed or preoccupied by something. Have you ever been there? (Of course you have.)

What kinds of things do you find yourself being anxious or worried about? Money? Circumstances? Your family? The state of our nation? The state of the visible church in our nation? Political unrest?

¹ All Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version (ESV) unless otherwise noted.

² Calvin's *New Testament Commentaries*, Volume 11, p.289

In Matthew 6:25–27 our Lord Jesus teaches us:

“Therefore I tell you, *do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?*”

We do tend to worry about the details of our lives, especially for our material needs. Yet we are to trust that God, who is *our heavenly Father*, will take care of us. We must learn to trust Him, and to pray.

The Power of Prayer

That leads us to our *second* point – *the power of prayer*. Thankfully, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul *doesn't* just tell us to *stop being anxious* or to *stop worrying*, but he also gives us the *solution* to anxiety and worry – *prayer*.

Notice that here in our text Paul *contrasts anxiety with prayer*. In v.6 Paul writes,

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

Be anxious for *nothing*, but instead pray about *everything*! If it's big enough to cause you worry or anxiety, it's big enough to pray about. You can either be a *worrier*, or you can be a *prayer warrior*.

To pray is to ask God for help, to **'let our requests be made known to God.'** It is to admit that we *need* God, that we are *dependent upon Him*, and that we are *not* able to handle everything on our own.

You have probably heard the old saying that “God will never give you more than you can handle.” That's just *not* true. If God never gave us more than we could handle, *would we ever really pray?*

Notice that Paul says that we are to pray **“with thanksgiving.”** Why does he add that there? Why must we not only pray and present our requests to God, but also *give Him thanks* while doing so?

Once again, John Calvin is helpful. He writes:

“Because many often pray to God amiss, with complaints or murmurings, as though they had just ground for accusing Him, while others cannot brook delay if He does not act immediately obey their wishes, Paul joins thanksgiving with prayers. *It is as though he had said, that those things that are necessary for us ought to be desired from the Lord in such a way that we nevertheless subject our affections to His will, and give thanks while asking.* And, unquestionably, gratitude will have the effect upon us that the will of God will be the chief sum of our desires.”³

Prayer with thanksgiving is prayer that *expresses trust* in God's goodness and faithfulness as our heavenly Father. It is prayer that trusts that God will answer for our good according to His will.

3 Ibid, p.289-290

The Apostle Peter also teaches us to pray this same way, doesn't he? In 1 Peter 5:6–7 he writes,

“Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, *casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.*”

We are to cast our cares or anxieties on God in the sure knowledge and trust that He cares for us! We are to *unburden* ourselves to Him.

Are you a Christian? If so, do you know that *God* cares for *you*? Does that knowledge *amaze* you like it should? It amazed David. In Psalm 8:3–4 he writes,

**“When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,
what is man that you are mindful of him,
and the son of man that you care for him?”**

If God cared enough for you, as sinful as you are, that He sent His beloved Son to die for your sins and raised Him up again for your justification, surely you can trust Him for the *lesser* things of this life!

The Promise of Prayer – the Peace of God

That brings us to our *third* and *final* point – *the promise of prayer*. And that promise is *the very peace of God*! In v.7 Paul writes,

“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

That is the promise that God's Word gives us is **“the peace of God.”**

Our closing hymn today is the old classic hymn, “What a Friend We Have in Jesus.” The very first verse says,

“What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer!
O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear,
all because we do not carry everything to God in prayer.”

How often have *you* 'forfeited' peace simply because you didn't pray and carry your burdens to God? James 4:2 says that *we have not because we ask not*.

A few things about this peace:

First, it is **“the peace of God.”**

The world offers *fake* peace. Drugs or alcohol might *numb the pain* for a time; *entertainment* might *distract* you from your problems and your pain, but those things *don't* give you real peace. They don't give you peace that lasts. Only God gives true peace.

Second, the peace of God **“surpasses all understanding.”**

All earthly forms of peace just fall far short. We don't know what to *say*. We don't know what to *do*. We don't even know what to *think*. Sometimes you just can't make sense out of anything.

But *God* can give you the kind of peace that *cannot be explained*. God alone can give you true peace of heart and mind, even when it seems like everything is falling apart.

God alone can give you peace that is *beyond your ability to comprehend or explain*. When it makes no worldly sense to be able to have peace (even in the face of death), *God* can give you true peace.

Third, we are told that the peace of God **“will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”** The word **“guard”** there in v.7 is a military term.

God's peace *guards and protects* both your *heart* and your *mind*. And don't we need *both of those things* guarded by the God of peace? The heart and the mind stand for *all that we are in the inner man* – our thoughts, our emotions, our wills, our inclinations – everything.

Lastly, the peace of God can be yours **“in Christ Jesus.”**

The Lord Jesus Christ is the One in whom we have peace with God (Romans 5:1). And in order to have the peace *of* God, you must first be at peace *with* God.

Are *you* at peace with God through faith in Jesus Christ? If not, you *can* be. Repent from your sin and turn to God through faith in Jesus Christ, and you can be reconciled to God.

And once you are at peace *with* God, you may also have the peace *of* God.

Isaiah 48:22 says, **“There is no peace,” says the LORD, “for the wicked.”** When you are *not* at peace with God, every bad thing that looms over you or comes into your life is just *another reminder of the wrath of God* that you deserve, and that is one day sure to come. You have no real peace.

But when you *are* at peace with God through faith in Jesus, you can know that even the very *worst* things that come your way in this life come to you through the hand of your Heavenly Father, who promises to make *all things* work together *for your good* (Romans 8:28).

May the *God of peace* teach us to pray, and may He grant us His peace that surpasses all understanding, now and always. - Amen