

Joy and Peace

At Christmas time it is customary for us to extend to our friends and neighbours the wish that they will experience the joy and peace of Christ in their lives.

After all, doesn't everyone want joy and peace? But how do we anticipate that our greeting will be fulfilled?

There is so much turmoil in the world. How wonderful if it could all be replaced with peace.

So many human lives are dominated by pain, disappointment, frustration and bitterness. Doesn't everyone crave joy?

In Philippians Paul proposes that joy and peace are, in fact, attainable. For Paul, joy and peace are the available benefits, though not without great price, as Christ own experience demonstrated.

Of course, Paul does not suggest that joy and peace simply descend upon us in some magical way. It is his conviction that the more closely our lives are linked, with Jesus Christ, at whatever cost, the more that this joy and peace will transform us.

For Paul joy and peace are God's gracious gifts. They become a reality for us as we commit ourselves to the discipline of following in the way of Christ.



Is Persistence a Virtue?

A quotation that is in vogue these days claims that insanity is really just "doing the same things over and over again and expecting a different outcome."

In Philippians Paul proposes that persistence is a virtue. However, he is not advocating the sort of mindless repetition that this quotation suggests is so pointless.

There are at least two distinctive characteristics to the persistence that Paul commends. He advocates a persistence that will not falter either because we lack sufficient commitment to the cause or because we lack the courage to continue.

Also, of course, Paul is not suggesting that we become slavishly committed to endlessly repeating some doomed human objective. Instead, he challenges believers to be persistent in being faithful to the Lord.

Like the athlete contending for the prize or the soldier preparing for the battle the Christian is to be resolute in pressing on toward the goal.

Each day then brings fresh opportunities for us to demonstrate that our commitment to Christ is genuine and sincere. Paul encourages his original readers in Philippi, and all who read his letter today, to persist in following Jesus Christ.

Philippians Study # 4



Reading and Reflecting
on God's Word
Together

Philippians for Today

Welcome to a brief study series that is intended to help you take a fresh look at the letters of the Apostle Paul.

To emphasize the contemporary tone of Paul's letters our recommended text is the Contemporary English Version (CEV).

For your convenience the CEV text of Philippians has been provided in a separate booklet. You will also need access to a complete Bible of whatever translation you ordinarily use.

Philippians is all about our human quest for joy and peace.

This final study in the series will explore Paul's concept of "**Persisting in Faithfulness.**"

Paul says, "Please keep on being faithful to the Lord. You are my pride and joy." (Phil. 4:1)

Take the time while reading the text to listen carefully. It is helpful to read a passage through more than once before trying to interpret it.

The following outline and notes may help clarify some of the details of the text.

Philippians 4: A simple Outline

Vs. 1 A call to persevere.
Vss. 2-9 Practical advice for living.
Vss. 10-20 Appreciation for their gifts.
Vss. 21-23 Final greetings.

Verse 1 appears to refer not only to what follows in the final chapter but also to what Paul has just been saying in chapter 3.

Verses 2 & 3 refer to a local dispute, Note how Paul appeals both to those who are contending with each other and to the community to bring about reconciliation.

Verses 8 & 9 offer a wonderful focus for Christian living.

In vss. 10-20 Paul speaks about the generosity of giving and its benefits for both the giver of the gift and the recipient.

Vs. 18 refers again to Epaphroditus, who had been mentioned before in chapter 2, verses 25-30.

Paul's final greetings in verses 21-23 make no references to individuals.

For Reflection and Discussion

You are encouraged to approach these topics on two levels. First, you are encouraged to make them a matter of some searching personal reflection. They are also intended to spark group discussion (if you are using this material in a group).

Paul refers by name to two individuals in Philippi who have a conflict. (Verses 2ff.)

Do you think that being singled out for attention will help them resolve their conflict?

Is there a lesson for us in the way that Paul both commends and corrects them?

Do you think that what Paul says in verses 4 through 9 has some relationship to this dispute?

In what ways does Paul involve the whole community in resolving the conflict.

Paul expresses thanks to the church in Philippi for their continued financial support. (Verses 10-20).

What does Paul teach us about the need for mutual support in the Christian community?

In what ways does Paul express his gratitude?

What do you think Paul means when he speaks about "the blessings that come from giving"? (verse 17)

Paul refers to some of God's people who are "in the service of the Emperor." (Vs.22)

Given the political realities of those times do you find this reference surprising.

Do you feel that Paul's comment suggests a change in attitude from that reflected in the references to Roman officials in the gospels?

Do you think that this comment can be applied to anything that is part of our experience today.

As time permits you may want to consider:

It is suggested that you end this study of Philippians by finding the time to read completely through the letter without interruption. This will not only refresh your familiarity with the text but leave you with a final impression of what Paul wants to share.

Were you impressed with Paul's repeated emphasis on Christ as the source of our human peace and joy?

Are there any portions of Paul's letter which have a special significance for you?