

Living While You Wait

Introduction (Text: Philippians 4:4-7)

- A. It is obvious from the way Paul begins this section that his mind is not preoccupied with heaven. **We are energized by the promise of the coming of the Savior, but we must live now while we eagerly await His coming.**
- B. **There are distinct qualities that mark the life of those who live in expectation of the coming of the Lord, and who know themselves to be citizens of heaven, though resident aliens of earth.**

#1: Undaunted Joy

- A. Two times in the letter Paul urged the Christians at Philippi to **“rejoice in the Lord” (3:1 and 4:4)**. This second time he repeats the call twice, **“Rejoice...I will say it again: Rejoice!”** and adds the word **“always.”** **The joy of the Christian is not a passing quality.** Rejoicing is not to be reserved for special times of worship or praise. It is to be uninterrupted and unbroken.
- B. For Paul to repeat twice in **4:4** the injunction to rejoice must mean that conditions in Philippi were such as to make the call to rejoice seem unreasonable. **So he is saying, in spite of of annoyance, disagreement, persecution —rejoice!** This was a theme of the apostle’s life. In a letter to another Macedonian church he wrote, **“Rejoice always” (1 Thessalonians 5:16)**, and in **2 Corinthians 6:10** he speaks of himself as **“sorrowful, yet always rejoicing;...”**
- C. **The Lord is risen and reigning, the power of His Resurrection is available; to rejoice is to appropriate and rest upon the redemption won by Him for us, and to live in the freedom His redemption provides.**

#2: Gentleness

- A. The Greek word (**epieikes**) in **verse 5** for **“gentleness”** is one of the most untranslatable Greek words, according to William Barclay. The baffling difficulty is seen in the way both the old and new translations of the Bible have rendered it.
- The KJV—**“moderation”**; Wycliffe—**“patience”**; Tyndale and Cranmer—**“softness”**; the Geneva Bible—**“the patient mind”**; The Rheims Bible—**“modesty”**; Moffatt and the RSV—**“forbearance”**; NEB—**“magnanimity,”**; ESV—**“reasonableness.”**
 - It is a fruitful exercise to reflect on these different translations and question ourselves as to whether the words describe us. I come to **“patient of mind”** and am condemned. **How often do I appear gentle, try to be gentle and**

understanding, but my mind is in high gear—questioning, judging, filled with unkind thoughts, even condemning.

- **“Magnanimity!”**—that’s a big word for a big heart, a heart that is open enough, soft/tender enough, understanding enough to accept another as the other is, to receive another into relationship unconditionally, without prejudging.
- Robert Frost said, **“Home is something you somehow haven’t to deserve.”** If we are magnanimous, our hearts are homes to which persons may come without being worthy or deserving.

B. Our translation uses the word **“gentleness.”** It is a lost word, I’m afraid, as a description of Christians. **Our way of relating is shaped by the brusque world in which we live—a world of assertiveness, bluntness, curtness, presumption. What yeast in the leaven might we become if we cultivated gentleness?**

- This is no **“soft”** virtue, but rather a bent of character that controls our capacity for rage and activates our capacity to love.
- **The gentle are courteous and kind; exercise restraint; practice reticence in speech, knowing that words can wound and silence may be more affirming than chatter. The gentle do not intrude into another’s life but are available to and responsive to others’ needs.**
- It is no wonder Paul names gentleness as a fruit of the Spirit (**Galatians 5:23**).

#3: Peace Through Prayer

A. **“Do not be anxious about anything”**—an admonition that touches the quick of every person. **Anxiety, in the popular use of the term, is our most common problem.** Worry, confusion of mind, pressures of daily life, uncertainty about the future—if we began to catalog specific aspects within these general categories, we would soon run out of space.

B. **In his study of “self-actualizing” persons, the psychologist Abraham Maslow found that they shared, in varying degrees, certain attitudes. One of these was tolerance for uncertainty.** They seemed to know how to live with the unknown without feeling threatened or frightened.

- Taking a cue from Maslow, psychologists are talking a great deal about a **“tolerance for ambiguity.”** How much to the point.
- **Uncertainty and ambiguity—not knowing about the future, and confusion about values and things as they are—are characteristics of life.** How we need to appropriate Paul’s word, **“Do not be anxious about anything.”**

D. **Anxiety, in the way Paul is using the term, and the way we most often experience it, is the futile, frustrating, debilitating attempt to bear the burdens**

of life and especially of the future, ourselves, alone. The Christian answer to anxiety is confident prayer which issues in **“the peace of God which transcends all understanding”** (v. 7).

- **This is no glib word, no pious cliché, no easy moralizing about complex issues.** Remember, Paul was in prison. Think about for even a minute the immediate circumstances out of which this word came, and let the movement of his life be flashed, however quickly, upon the screen of your mind.
- At every step of his Christian journey, the hound of anxiety was snapping at his heels. And even when the hound was not in biting distance, its howl must have sounded loud in his ears. **Fears, uncertainty about the future, persecution, physical disease, mental anguish—again the list could become a catalog.**
- Paul’s word comes from the sweaty arena of life where his word needs to be heard, and from a person who has experienced the answer he is offering.

E. His offer of prayer is not an easy solution; no magic formula here, no bedtime or morning rote repetition of words that we have labeled prayer.

- **He is talking about the serious business of bringing our lives before God, examining our dependence upon God, placing our lives in God’s hands to be used, remembering and celebrating what God has already done, confessing our needs and dedicating our gifts, committing ourselves and all that we are to make our common cause God’s kingdom, not our own kingdom.**
- When prayer is seen in that fashion, then it is not glib to say that anxiety is an attempt to carry the burden of the present and the future oneself; prayer is yielding it to and leaving it in the hands of God.

F. Prayer, supplication, and requests are not to be separated; they are synonyms. Thanksgiving is prayer also, and gratitude for the past benefits of God cultivates confidence in future ones.

- There can be little question that Paul was familiar with the teachings of Jesus. This is one of the many instances verifying that knowledge **(Matthew 6:23ff).**
- Maslow has stated that the creativeness of “self-actualizers” is “like that of unspoiled children.” Jesus said we must become “like children” to possess the kingdom.
- The childlike capacity to trust, to trust God for the present and the future, is characteristic of **“Christian-actualizers.” We cultivate the capacity to trust through our life of prayer. As our capacity to trust expands, our tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity grows and our anxiety diminishes.**

#4: Result of Prayer—the Peace of God

- A. The peace of God then **“will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”** The opposite of anxiety is peace. Not numbness nor unconcern, not the absence of inner and outward struggle, but God’s peace, the peace that is from Him, giving us hope and confidence, strengthening us to carry on with joy when the burdens are heavy and the pathway rough.
- B. This has little to do with outward circumstances, which is why Paul said the peace of God will **“guard your hearts and your minds.”** The word in Greek (phroureo) for **“guard”** or **“keep”** was employed when speaking of a company of soldiers keeping watch over a city—a good metaphor. **God’s peace is an inward sentinel protecting us, keeping watch that we be not invaded by all the alien forces that would disrupt and ravage our minds and hearts, making us impotent by crushing us with anxiety (2 Corinthians 4:16-18).** Remember: **“The way to be anxious about nothing is to be prayerful about everything.”**