

Philippians 4:2-9

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I read somewhere that a particular survey indicated that only 8% of the things people worry about actually happen. For worriers like me, that's good news! It means that if I worry about everything, there's a 92% chance that it will never happen! Of course, that was not the point of the survey. The point of the survey was that most of what folks worry about is either imaginary, likely to never happen anyway, or involves matters over which we have no control. In other words, worry is—for the most part—useless and unproductive. As Mark Twain (1835-1910) once said, "I am an old man and have known a great many troubles, but most of them have never happened."

Worry—it is like a rocking chair; it will give you something to do, but it won't get you anywhere. For those of us who tend to worry too much, and I confess that I am one of these folks, today is the tomorrow that we worried about yesterday. And what did our worrying do for us? Nothing—except to make us troubled and tired for today. It has been said that "there is no need to nervously pace the deck of the ship of life when the Great Pilot is at the wheel." The Apostle Paul would have agreed with this bit of wisdom, for he writes in the Letter to the Philippians:

Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God (4:7, NRSV).

This brings us to our text for today: Phil 4:2-9. These verses are a Pauline hodgepodge of instructions, imperatives, and ideas. In fact, an appropriate heading for this text might be "Etc: *et cetera* According to Paul." Let's read.

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 (TNIV).

That Paul had women as coworkers in Philippi should surprise us none, since—according to Acts 16:13-15—the church in Philippi had its origins among some Gentile women who, as “God-fearers,” met by the river on the Jewish Sabbath for prayer. The evidence from Acts indicates that at her conversion Lydia became patron—that is, she became the primary source of support—both of the small band of apostles and of the newborn Christian community. By the very nature of things, that meant she was also a leader in the church, since heads of households automatically assumed the same role in the church that was centered in their household. Furthermore, Macedonian women in general had a much larger role in public life than we find elsewhere in the Roman Empire; in Philippi in particular, women were also well known for their religious devotion.

Paul speaks specifically to two women: Euodia and Syntyche (v. 2). We know very little about these women other than the facts that they were longtime friends and coworkers of Paul, and that they were no longer seeing eye to eye with each other. Paul urges these two women “to be of the same mind in the Lord”—“be of the same mind” links this appeal with those of 2:2 and 3:15. *Paul is urging Euodia and Syntyche to have the mind of Christ Himself, which means to think of others rather to think of themselves.* Euodia and Syntyche are to have the same attitude toward one another as the attitude of Jesus Christ. They are to love each other as Jesus loves them. Our mission and motto at the Plymouth Church of Christ is: “Loving others as Jesus loves us.” This statement is not original with us, for this concept is one that Paul proclaims in a variety of ways to the Christians in first-century Philippi. Possessing and practicing “the mind of Christ” is to love others as Jesus loves us.

Somewhat surprisingly, Paul addresses another coworker, asking him to *help* Euodia and Syntyche get along with each other: “Yes, and I ask you, my true companion, help these women . . .” (v. 3). What makes this statement somewhat of a surprise is that in a letter addressed to the whole church, Paul singles out one person in this way—something

he does nowhere else in his community-directed letters. Apparently, this singled-out individual is so well known to the Philippians that Paul does not need to name him. Of course, since we do know for sure about whom Paul is speaking, there has been no shortage of suggestions! To my mind, the two most plausible suggestions are Epaphroditus or Luke. About “Clement and the rest of my [Paul’s] co-workers” we know nothing.

The paragraph of verses 4–7 consists of a series of commands that appear to have little connection with each other. Perhaps we can best simply see this as Paul’s “*et cetera*” section. Paul may be echoing Ps 145:18—“The LORD is near to all who call on him.” At the same time, Paul may also have in mind Zeph 1:7, 14—“The day of the LORD is near.” The Lord Jesus who is expected to come from heaven is also the Lord who is present with His people. The Lord has come, is come, and is coming. The coming one is already here, and the one who is already here is coming. Jesus Christ is both with His people in the here-and-now, and He is coming one day to take His people to the here-after. *Paul’s point seems to be that since Jesus is ever present, we should not worry but rather pray.* Anxiety and apprehension characterize a life lacking in faith and trust; for such a person the present is all there is, and it is a present of uncertainty. For the believer, on the other hand, Jesus is present in the present—in the midst of turmoil and tribulation—and because He is here with us now, we do not face this world alone nor do we face an uncertain future. The “peace of God” (v. 7) that comes from the “God of peace” (v. 9) is a “garrison”—a striking military metaphor—is a “garrison” around our hearts and our minds when anxiety and apprehension threaten. The peace promised here is far more than the absence of conflict; rather, it is God’s *shalom*—it is total well-being, and it comes from God to those who are in Christ Jesus and who share His attitude, so that His “heart and mind” become theirs.

And so, for those who are in Christ Jesus, Paul says, “Here are some things to think about since you have the mind of Christ.”

Finally, 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. Whatever 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 (4:8-9, TNIV).

In the language of Hellenistic moralism, Paul tells the Philippian Christians to take into account the best of their Greco-Roman heritage, as long as it has moral excellence and is praiseworthy.

Looking back over the text we have studied, let's make some practical applications. *First, there is much we can learn today from the way in which Paul handled the problem of the dispute between Euodia and Syntyche.* We do not know precisely what the trouble was, but it sounds all too familiar! Clearly there was rivalry and tension between these women. Paul urges them “to be of the same mind *in the Lord*” which is a call to embrace the mind of Christ—Christ who emptied Himself, who humbled Himself, and who was obedient to death on a cross. If Christ behaved like that, how must those who are “in Christ” behave? Put like that, it is clear what Euodia and Syntyche should do! If they do not do it, they are in effect denying that they are “in Christ.” *Should we, perhaps, focus less on who is right and who is wrong and ask instead, “What does it mean for us, as a body of believers, to have the mind of Christ?”*

Second, in a world where fear is a much greater reality than joy, it is our privilege as Christians to live out the gospel of true peace, wholeness in every sense of that word, and to point others to the source—the God of peace. A more peaceful world begins with me. It begins with me possessing and practicing the mind of Christ. “Loving others as Jesus loves us.” Failing to so love others indicates a failure to have the mind of Christ. And if we do not have the mind of Christ, how can we call ourselves the Church of Christ? Yes, we may be a body; but without love, we are brain dead.

Third, we must “worry” the right way. It is instructive to note that the verb used in 4:6—“anxious” or “worry” (μεριμνάω—*merimnaō*)—was also used in 2:20—“genuine interest” or “genuine concern”—of the concern Timothy felt for the Philippians’ welfare. It is a mark of Christian maturity (3:15) to be able to distinguish between the anxiety that cripples the individual and the concern for others that builds up the whole community.

Fourth, the virtues mentioned in verse 8 were among those that were honored in the pagan world, a fact that reminds us that we should not be afraid to take over the best in our secular world and claim it for Christ. We live in a postmodern, media-saturated world, where truth is relative and morality is up for grabs. What are we, as Christians, to do? Do we reject the worldly culture, withdrawing ourselves from it? Do we accept the

worldly culture, accommodating ourselves to it? The answer to both questions is “No.” There is a better way. We engage our culture with discrimination. We approach the marketplace, the arts, the media, the university with a discriminating eye and heart, using the Crucified Christ as our standard. We embrace what is good, wherever we find it, but we do so in a discriminating way, ever holding before us the One who was crucified on a cross. And it is through the Crucified Christ that we receive the peace of God from the God of peace.

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