

Philippians: Rejoice in the Gospel of Jesus Christ

Session 12: Final Exhortations in the Gospel (Philippians 4:1-9)

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Abstract

In this session, Dr. Matthew S. Harmon analyzes the concluding exhortations of the Epistle to the Philippians (Philippians 4:1-9), framing them as a practical guide for applying the gospel to daily life. The text is structured around a rapid-fire series of commands that move from the internal state of the believer to their outward behavior, emphasizing that joy is anchored in the unchanging nature of the Lord rather than volatile personal circumstances. Harmon highlights Paul's antidote to anxiety as a combination of relentless prayer with thanksgiving and a disciplined effort to direct one's thoughts toward things that are honorable, pure, and excellent. Ultimately, the passage serves to reassure believers that by practicing these virtues and following Christ-like examples, they will experience the peace of God acting as a guard over their hearts and minds.

Outline

- I. Introduction and Context (Phil. 4:1-9)
 - A. Review of the previous section (Phil. 3:15-4:3)
 - 1. Call to imitate Paul and his co-workers
 - 2. Warning against the enemies of the cross
 - 3. Citizens of heaven awaiting a Savior
 - 4. Call to reconciliation (Euodia and Syntyche) and congregational support
 - B. Transition to the final letter conclusion: "Growth and Gratitude in the Gospel"
 - 1. Final exhortations in the gospel (4:1-9)
 - 2. Gratitude for gospel partnership (4:10-20)
 - 3. Final greetings (4:21-23)
- II. Scriptural Reading: Philippians 4:4-9
- III. Exposition of the Final Exhortations (Phil. 4:4-9)
 - A. Rejoicing in the Lord (v. 4)
 - 1. Repetition of the command to rejoice (recalling Phil. 3:1)
 - 2. The object of joy is the Lord himself
 - 3. Joy is independent of changing circumstances (such as Paul's house arrest)
 - 4. Joy and sorrow are not mutually exclusive; joy can coexist with grief
 - B. Exhibiting Reasonableness or Gentleness (v. 5a)

1. Meaning of the Greek term: level-headedness (ESV: reasonableness) or a gentle spirit (NIV/NASB)
 2. Seeking to diffuse conflict and bring restoration
 3. Contextual connection to the reconciliation of Euodia and Syntyche
 4. Required shown to everyone, not just those who are easy to deal with
- C. The Nearness of the Lord (v. 5b)**
1. Interpretive debate: temporal nearness (soon return) vs. spatial nearness (abiding presence)
 2. Intentional ambiguity: both aspects motivate gentleness
 3. Balancing firm conviction/boldness with gentleness
- D. The Antidote for Anxiety: Prayer and Thanksgiving (v. 6)**
1. Command: "Do not be anxious about anything"
 2. Jesus' teaching on anxiety in Matthew 6
 3. Comprehensiveness: nothing is too small to bring to God ("in everything")
 4. The means: Prayer (general) and Supplication (asking specifically)
 5. The attitude: with thanksgiving, reflecting confidence in a faithful Father
 6. Prayer as a first priority rather than a last resort
 7. Realistic approach: repeatedly bringing anxieties to God as an ongoing process
- E. The Result: The Peace of God (v. 7)**
1. Definition: peace as wholeness/completeness of God's eschatological salvation
 2. Experienced in the present while awaiting full realization
 3. Not merely a subjective feeling of calm or comfort
 4. Relational confidence to move forward despite uncertainty
 5. Character: surpasses all understanding, protecting the total self
 6. Action: acting as a guard/watchman over hearts and minds "in Christ Jesus"
 7. Caution against using "having peace" as the sole criterion for decision-making
- F. Directing the Mind (v. 8)**
1. Paul's "finally" transitions to the thought life
 2. Command: "think about these things" (consider, contemplate)
 3. The representative list: true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, worthy of praise
 4. Active agency: we are not helpless recipients of thoughts; we can direct our minds
 5. Broad application: includes nature, creation, and things not explicitly religious
 6. Thought life as the primary arena for battling sin
- G. Call to Application (v. 9)**
1. Formal instruction: what they have "learned and received"
 2. Observation: what they have "heard and seen in me"

3. Command: "practice these things" (intentional, repetitive action)

4. The promise: "the God of peace will be with you"

IV. Synthesis and Application

A. The Big Question: How can I apply the gospel on a daily basis?

B. Three Ways to Apply the Gospel:

1. Focus on the Lord (rather than self)

2. Pray about everything (as an ongoing dialogue)

3. Follow the right examples

C. Four Key Application Arenas:

1. Think: Intentional direction of the thought life

2. Believe: Knowing God longs to hear all our requests

3. Feel: Desiring the security and stability of God's peace in an anxious culture

4. Do: Identifying one specific thing for each of the qualities in Philippians 4:8 to put into practice