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Peace Through Prayer Philippians 4:6-7

Intro: If anybody had an excuse to worry, it was the Apostle Paul. His dearly loved friends and co-laborers in the gospel in Philippi were disagreeing with one another and he was not there to help alleviate the situation. We don't know what the beef was between Euodia and Syntyche but it was bringing division into the church. Besides this, Paul also had to deal with divisions among the believers in Rome (1:14-17). On top of these burdens was the added possibility of his own execution! Yes, Paul had plenty of good reasons to be worrying but he wasn't! Instead, he took the time to explain to us the secret to victory over worry.

What is worry? The Greek word translated anxious in vs6 means to be pulled in different directions. That's a pretty accurate description of worry because our hopes pull us in 1 direction and our fears pull us in the opposite direction and we are being pulled apart. The Old English root from which we get worry means to strangle and a good case of undue worry will literally strangle a person. Worry has real physical consequences such as headaches, neck pains, ulcers, even back pain. Worry affects our thinking, our digestion, our sleeping and our coordination.

From the spiritual perspective, worry is a combination of wrong thinking in the mind and wrong feeling in the heart about circumstances, people or things. More often than not, the things we worry about the most are things that we have absolutely no control over! Last week I mentioned that we all hold opinions concerning right and wrong but we often allow those opinions to overflow into the arena of God's sovereignty. Well, what stronger opinion does anyone hold than what is right and best for them? We all have plans, dreams and expectations for ourselves and those we are responsible for and when things don't go as planned, we have a tendency to worry.

This is how worry moves beyond physical discomfort to being sin. Undue care about things that are completely out of our control is yet another intrusion into an area that belongs to God alone. My worry over things that God controls implies that I believe I am the father of the household instead of the child. When I worry about things that I can't control, I'm actually telling

God that I don't trust His sovereign goodness and grace in my life. The implication is that I believe I could do a better job running my life than He can. Now, you may believe that at certain times in your life but in every instance, you are completely wrong – even dangerously wrong.

Worry is not only a sin; it's also the greatest thief of joy. Paul has just commanded the Philippians to rejoice in the Lord (twice) but worry prevents us from keeping that command. Of course, it's not enough for us to just tell ourselves to stop worrying because no amount of human determination will capture this thief. Worry is an inside job and takes more than good intentions to get the victory. The true antidote to worry is having the secure mind; a mind secured by the peace of God which guards you and the God of peace Who guides you. But for all this talk about worry, vs6 is actually not a formula for beating anxiety as much as it is an exceptional statement on the biblical doctrine of prayer.

6 – Few doctrines in Christianity are more generally misunderstood than that of prayer. It's completely misunderstood by nonbelievers and by many who profess the name of Jesus. This may be due to the fact that so few people know God well enough to be closely associated with Him in prayer, and since none of us are as closely associated with Him as we ought to be, prayer is at least partially confusing to us all. Does prayer change things? Or does prayer change people? Does God change His mind as the result of believing prayer? Or does God move us to pray? What does it mean to pray without ceasing? Who can pray? How do you pray? And why should a person pray anyway? In any group of believers most of these questions will have different and even conflicting answers.

What is prayer? The answer to that question would take months for us to unpack and deliberate over but what can we say about biblical prayer in the time allotted? The 1st thing that must be firmly established is that prayer is talking with God and as such, prayer is for believers only. Paul wasn't writing to the pagan world at Philippi or to the world at large. He's writing this to all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi; meaning prayer is exclusively for Christians. It's the means by which an empty soul that's been touched by Jesus can be immersed in the fountain of God's grace, can bask in God's goodness and be supernaturally refreshed for life's tasks. Prayer is the Christian's antidote for anxiety.

Now, I realize something called prayer is offered a billion times daily by millions of people who are not Christians, but this isn't in any way biblical prayer. Scores of non-Christian people in Asia spend hours of a day spinning prayer wheels. Indigenous tribes chant prayers in jungle clearings. New Agers finger prayer beads and crystals. Many will cry out a prayer in the midst of a tragedy or even give themselves over to a life of meditation. But, if the person involved is not a Christian then this is not true prayer. Prayer is talking with God and the only prayer God receives and answers is one that's made through Jesus Christ, who alone provides access to the Father's presence.

Jesus taught this very truth Himself when He said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (Jn 14:6). Jesus didn't say He was 1 of several ways to come to God or that He just pointed out the ways to God; He said He was the way to come to God, and added, lest anyone misunderstand Him, "No one comes to the Father except through Me." This means that no prayer offered to God apart from faith in the Lord Jesus Christ has ever been accepted or received by His heavenly Father. There are actually more passages in the Bible that explain when God will not answer prayer than there are passages in which He promises to do it, and God definitely says He won't answer the prayers of anyone who doesn't come to Him through faith in His Son.

Have you ever tried to pray and found God distant? Have you gone away without any real hope that God has heard you? It may be that you've never done the 1st thing God requires. Sin divides you like a wall from God's presence. That wall can only be removed by Jesus. You need to come to Jesus recognizing that you're separated from God by your sin and believe that Jesus died to remove that sin forever. Accept Jesus as your Savior and if you do that, God will remove your sin, and He will accept you as His child forever. Then, you will not only have the ability to pray, you will have both the right and the responsibility to pray.

But, there's a caveat to this truth. There are barriers to believer's prayer. While it's true God doesn't acknowledge the prayers of non-Christians, it's also often true that He doesn't acknowledge many of the prayers offered by many a believer. In fact, the Bible says that God will never hear a Christian's prayer so long as they're clinging to some sin in their heart (Ps 66:18). Isaiah teaches the same truth (Isa 59:1-2). Does this describe your prayer

life? If so, confess your sin openly and frankly to God, knowing that He's faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). We can only pray successfully if our life is an open book before Him.

We may readily accept that this is true but not really understand why it's true? In v6, Paul uses 3 different words to describe biblical prayer: prayer, supplication and thanksgiving. Prayer carries the idea of adoration, devotion and worship. If we, as God's children, choose to walk in rebellion of His word and His will, then our prayer isn't prayer at all but a sham. There can be no adoration, devotion or worship in our prayer if those things don't exist in our lives. Supplication is an earnest sharing of our needs and problems but if we're harboring unconfessed sin in our hearts, then the implication is: we want God's help but not His direction (Give me what I want but don't tell me what to do). If you're walking a path of rebellion, don't expect God to make it comfortable for you. Thanksgiving is appreciation but how can we be truly thankful for the character and nature of God if we constantly resist, reject or ignore His efforts to transform us into that very same image? Our hearts must be right with God if we want Him to receive our prayers.

This also speaks to freedom in prayer. In normal life, our familiarity with a person dictates the flow of conversation. If they're a stranger, we may discuss the weather, our jobs or families but never anything truly personal. There are others in our lives that we are comfortable sharing our problems or concerns with. Still, there are certain things we only discuss with our spouse. How easily we speak depends on how well we know the person. It's the same with our relationship to God. If we don't know Him well, if our sin keeps us from Him, if we don't recognize His characteristics and how He operates with people, then He's like a stranger to us and prayer flows slowly, even though we've come to faith in Jesus. But, if we deal with our sin and learn to spend time alone with our heavenly Father, then our prayer will become like the kind of conversation we have with a close friend.

So far, our discussion about prayer has had ourselves as the center; but if you know anything about prayer, you know that it also involves other people. No matter how intimate the conversation may be between a husband and wife, it doesn't always center on their own affairs exclusively. They share news about their kids, friends, co-workers and their concerns for them. It's the same with prayer. The Bible calls this prayer intercession (1 Tim 2:1). As

we meet with God in prayer, these concerns for others should also be a part of our conversation with Him.

Think back to our study of Acts and Peter's imprisonment. The church gathered together and prayed all night for Peter's release and God sent an angel to him with a "get out of jail free" card. Does this mean that God only takes care of other Christians when we pray? No, that would intrude upon His sovereignty and that's not what intercession means. It does mean that God allows us to share in the blessings He gives to others and He delights in using our prayers as the means by which He operates.

I've heard countless stories told over the years of missionaries who have experienced miraculous deliverances only to discover later that God had moved some believer far away to pray for that specific person at that specific time. Now, some may argue that God would've saved the missionary anyway, even if the other person hadn't prayed. Probably. But the point is that in God's marvelous working He moved someone halfway around the world to pray for another in that hour. So, years later they were able to share in the blessing of their friend's supernatural deliverance. In the same way we have the privilege, as God's children, of committing others into His hands for His blessing—our friends, neighbors, acquaintances, and family. As we do this, we're permitted to share in His blessing on them. Our Christian life holds fewer joys greater than this one right here.

There's one other point about prayer in this passage. Prayer is not just talking with God, nor is it just interceding for others. Prayer is also an opportunity to present our requests to Him. Paul calls them requests or petitions and God desires us to bring our earnest requests before Him. This is His cure for anxiety. Believers are troubled about many things but God invites us to place our requests about these things before Him. The promise of the next verse is that the peace of God will guard your heart and mind through Christ Jesus.

Remember, Paul was chained to a Roman soldier, guarded day and night, as he wrote this. In the same way, the peace of God stands guard over the 2 areas that create worry – the heart (wrong feeling) and the mind (wrong thinking). The word guard describes a military action and Clarke defines this as keeping us as in a strong place or a castle. This is something that the peace of God does for us; it allows us to fight from the high ground behind

solid walls of defense. In fact, when people seem to lose heart or “lose” their mind, it’s often connected with an absence of the peace of God in their life.

7 – What’s the peace of God? The Bible refers to 3 types of peace: 1) Peace with God – this is the relationship we enter into with God through the finished work of Jesus Christ: the cessation of hostilities. 2) Peace from God – Paul often uses this in the introductions of his letters and it reminds us that our peace comes to us as a gift from God. 3) Peace of God – the peace God possesses. Spurgeon described it as: the unruffled serenity of the infinitely-happy God, the eternal composure of the absolutely well-contented God. Nothing fazes God, nothing surprises or worries Him. The all-knowing, all-powerful, all-present God is perfectly at peace. This is the peace we’re promised when we engage in biblical prayer. It doesn’t mean the absence of trials without but it does mean a quiet confidence within, regardless of circumstances, people or things.

Noticed that the verse doesn’t say we will necessarily receive the things we ask for. It doesn’t say, Be anxious for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God, and God will fulfill your requests. It says “the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds through Christ Jesus.” Our prayers are often in misguided and just wrong, and we pray for things that are not good for us. God doesn’t promise to give us these things. However, God does promise to give a supernatural peace to those who share their real needs with Him. That it surpasses understanding doesn’t mean it’s impossible to understand; it’s just beyond our ability to understand and explain – so, it must be experienced!

Don’t think Paul was commanding something for others that he hadn’t found to be true for himself. Paul had also had this experience. Consider the prayer Paul wrote in **Rom 15**. He was in Corinth and about to go on to Jerusalem with the collection from the gentile churches. After that he planned to travel to Rome as an ambassador of the gospel. He asked prayer for 3 things: 1) to be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea; 2) that his service would be acceptable to the saints there; and 3) that God’s will would bring him with joy to Rome (**Rom 15:31-32**).

How were Paul’s requests answered? We don’t know every aspect of God’s answers, but we know his 1st request wasn’t fulfilled. Paul fell into the hands

of unbelievers and spent 2 years in prison as a result, though his life was spared. We have no information about his second request but it's possible that he didn't receive a warm welcome from the church. Finally, we know his 3rd request was fulfilled, but only after long delays and through much hardship. When Paul arrived in Rome at last, he arrived as a prisoner in chains.

God certainly didn't answer Paul's requests as Paul intended. But God did answer, and He answered exactly as Paul indicates in his words about prayer to the Philippians. He answered by giving Paul peace. Paul knew God's peace even in the most difficult of earthly circumstances, and he writes out of these circumstances to tell us also to make our requests of God, our heavenly Father.

As we have seen, biblical prayer (right praying) isn't something every Christians does automatically or immediately because it depends on having the right mind. This is why Paul's formula for peace is found at the end of Philippians and not at the beginning. Right praying is the natural result of employing all the doctrine Paul has established in the first 3 chapters. If we have the single mind of **ch1** then we can give proper adoration. How can a double-minded person ever truly praise God? If we have the submissive mind of **ch2** we can properly come with supplication. Would someone with a proud mind ask God for anything? If we come with the spiritual mind of **ch3** then we can properly show our appreciation. A carnally-minded person wouldn't even know that God had given them anything to appreciate! In other words, we must practice what's laid out in **ch1-3** if we ever hope to experience the secure mind of **ch4**.

The first step in having the secure mind is right praying. Paul commands us to not worry about anything but to pray about everything! Talking to God about everything that concerns us pleases Him and it's the first step towards victory over worry. There are 2 more steps that we'll consider next week: right thinking and right living. Both are necessary requirements in possessing the secure mind as both also result in experiencing the peace of God in our lives. 😊