

struggles that end in division telegraph to the world that the message of Yeshua is no different than the contentions that go on among the factions of any society.

... *together with Clement also and the rest of my fellow workers*, – Once again, we really cannot be certain who this “Clement” was nor are the others noted as Paul’s fellow workers identified. The best we can say is that this Clement as well as the other workers were those who remained in Philippi after Paul left, and who had been appointed by Paul to carry out the general work necessary for the Philippian community to strive to maintain its voice for the gospel in that region.

... *whose names are in the book of life*. – Here Paul mentions the eschatological reality of believers’ names being written in the “book of life.” This undoubtedly rests upon the request of Moses to God while upon the mountain, with the golden calf incident in place, and Moses intercedes on behalf of wayward Israel for God to forgive their sin and not to blot them out of His book.

But now, if You will, forgive their sin — and if not, please blot me out from Your book which You have written!” The LORD said to Moses, “Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book. But go now, lead the people where I told you. Behold, My angel shall go before you; nevertheless in the day when I punish, I will punish them for their sin.” (Ex 32:32–34)

This tells us that from Paul’s perspective, even though Euodia and Syntyche were causing division with the Philippian community, their names were still written in the “book of life.” This emphasizes an important point, and it is this: even true believers in Yeshua can, in their disobedience to the very leading of the Spirit, bring about division with the body of Messiah by their self-centered unwillingness to submit to the Scripture as well as to the Spirit’s leading in its application to community life.

4 – Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!

Paul now begins his conclusion to this epistle to the Philippian community, and he emphasizes the very admonition with which he began this letter:

I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, (χαρίς, *xaris*) - (Phil 1:3–4)

Moreover, he has emphasized that one of the inevitable components of exercising genuine faith in God is that of joy.

Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith, (1:25)

To “rejoice” is simply to express one’s inner “joy,” and in our verse Paul’s inspired words are a command set forth in the eternal words of Scripture. In doing so, he gives us the source of true joy for the believer and identifies such joy as a sure characteristic of all who are truly encompassed by God’s saving grace in Yeshua.

The source of our joy is God Himself, that is, the saving work He has accomplished through Yeshua and the inevitable reality that all whom He redeems are guaranteed eternity with Him since the Ruach HaKodesh has been given as the “down payment” (*ἀρραβῶν*, *arrabōn*) of our inheritance, and thus our eternity in the very presence of God is guaranteed.

Now He who establishes us with you in Messiah and anointed us is God, who also sealed us and gave us the Ruach in our hearts as a pledge (*arrabōn*). (2Cor 1:21–22)

Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave to us the Ruach as a pledge (*arrabōn*). (2Cor 5:5)

In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation — having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge (*arrabōn*) of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God’s own possession, to the praise of His glory. (Eph 1:13–14)

But what is Paul’s meaning in our text when he exhorts us to “rejoice in the Lord always” (*Χαίρετε ἐν κυρίῳ πάντοτε*)? Clearly he is not teaching us that we should never be sorrowful, for the Scriptures command us to “weep with those who weep” (Rom 12:15) and Paul himself, in this very epistle speaks of the sorrow he experienced during the severe illness that came upon Epaphroditus:

For indeed he was sick to the point of death, but God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, so that I would not have sorrow upon sorrow. (Phil 2:27)

It is clear, then, that when Paul commands us “to rejoice in the Lord always,” he is not equating “rejoicing” with the human emotion of “happiness” or “joy.” Yeshua Himself sorrowed at the death of Lazarus even though He soon would raise him from the dead.

When Yeshua therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, He was deeply moved in spirit and was troubled, and said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to Him, “Lord, come and see.” Yeshua wept. (Jn 11:33–35)

Therefore, it is important, first of all, that since rejoicing is commanded, it is not to be equated with the emotion of happiness or demands the believer to never experience sadness and sorrow. Rather, what Paul enjoins upon us is the exercise of our faith and thus the unmovable reality that God is in control and will bring about His sovereign will, including the means by which those who are His will persevere through whatever trials they may face, and do so for His glory. In short, to “rejoice” is to affirm the truth of God in all of His glory and power, and to continue to confess that nothing can separate the child of God from His all-controlling love, omnipotence, and grace. Rejoicing, then, is the fruit of exercising one’s faith in God, even when the fallen world in which we live may bring sorrow. And even in times of sorrow, the believer in Yeshua is enabled to lay hold of that which brings settled joy by exercising the gift of faith.

...and again I say rejoice. – Paul repeats the command to “rejoice” (*χαίρετε, xairete*), undoubtedly for emphasis. Since our verse begins Paul’s conclusion of his epistle, and since “rejoice” (*xairete*) could be used as a “formalized greeting,” some have suggested the Paul’s double use of the word in our verse could be understood as an ending salutation. One modern translation (*The New Testament: An American Translation*) renders our verse as: “Good-bye, and the Lord be with you always. Again I say, good-bye.” But this has no basis whatsoever in the current context. Paul is simply emphasizing that the life of a true child of God will inevitably be characterized by a persevering faith that lives out the hope and certainty of God’s all controlling power and promises.

It is this very truth that should encourage the believer in Yeshua to be fully engaged in the study of the Scriptures in order to know the truth of God and to constantly affirm their trust and faith in Him. This likewise is enhanced by a fervent and regular life of prayer together with a commitment regularly to gather together in a community of

faith in order to encourage and be encouraged in the faith.

5 – Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near.

Let your gentle spirit – Having admonished the Philippian community (and us) to rejoice in the Lord’s almighty power and love, he now connects this with how we treat others.

He first describes the overall demeanor of the believer in Yeshua as having a “gentle spirit.” The NASB has chosen “gentle spirit” to translate the Greek τὸ ἐπιεικὲς ὑμῶν (*to epieikes humōn*). The Greek word ἐπιεικῆς (*epieikēs*) can carry the sense of “not insisting on every right or letter of the law or custom, yielding, gentle, kind, courteous, tolerant.”¹ Paul’s point, therefore, is that we should approach others with a general welcoming demeanor on the basis that all have been created in the image of God. Granted, this calls for wisdom, but Paul’s emphasis here is that we resist the fleshly tendency to prejudge others based upon our own personal “list of criteria.” Thus, the NASB “gentle spirit” could more fully be understood to mean “not prejudging others on the basis of one’s personal likes and dislikes.”

... *be known to all men* – This is particularly necessary within one’s own believing community. Rather than requiring others to conform to one’s own personal likes and dislikes, the goal ought to be to help one another become more and more like Yeshua and to live out a life of obedience to God’s commands and instructions given to us in the Scriptures. And this was particularly true in the early communities of “The Way,”² for in the early communities comprised of followers of Yeshua, there was still a tension between Jewish and non-Jewish members, the Jewish members degrading the Gentile believers as “second class citizens” in the family of God. By using the term “men” (ἄνθρωποις, *anthrōpōis*) he is including all people: male, female, all ethnicities.

So once again, Paul emphasizes that the family of God is made up of those God has chosen from “every nation,” as the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant.³ This is fundamental to maintaining a growing and vibrant community, for all too often divisions that occur within a given community arise from people judging each other on the basis of their own likes and dislikes. Rather than forcing one’s own preferences upon others, the goal ought to be for all to become more like Yeshua

1 BDAG, “ἐπιεικῆς,” p. 371.

2 Cf. Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 24:14, 22.

3 Cf. Gen 12:3; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14.

and to help each other move toward that goal through loving encouragement and acceptance. It is by this, and the gracious work of the Ruach, that we are enabled to build each other up in the faith.

... *the Lord is near*. – This phrase echoes a similar phrase, “the time is near” in John’s Apocalypse, which likewise emphasizes the coming of Yeshua as He promised. Note, for example,

Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near. (Rev 1:3)

And he said to me, “Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near. (Rev 22:10)

We read in the Epistle of Jude this same emphasis on living with expectation for the coming of Yeshua.

But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Yeshua Messiah to eternal life. (Jude 1:20–21)

But Paul’s words here may also emphasize not only living with the expectation of His imminent coming but also of the reality that by His Ruach, He is always with us, and he may therefore even have the words of the Psalmist in mind.

The LORD is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth. (Ps 145:18)

Both aspects which this phrase engenders are true! We are always to live with the expectation of Yeshua’s coming as well as knowing that we now live in the very presence of our Lord, even as He promised His disciples before He ascended to the Father:

... and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. (Matt 28:20)

And James gives us a similar admonition:

You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. (James 5:8)

6 – Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

Paul’s words here echo Yeshua’s “Sermon on the Mount” (Matt 6:25–34) in which He employs the same Greek verb, *μεριμνάω* (*merimnaō*), which, in these contexts carries the general sense of “be anxious, be (unduly) concerned.” Yeshua teaches:

For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? (Matt 6:25–26)

Yeshua characterizes such “anxiety” as one’s inability to know what the future holds regarding the necessities of life, which are represented by food and clothing. He then compares the manner in which God maintains the lives of mere animals, and offers a *kal v’chomer* argument to show that if God is concerned about the animals, how much more would He provide for His own children!

Be anxious for nothing – Thus Paul likewise gives the inspired command: “be anxious for nothing.” By this he is not dismissing the need to be diligent in our daily work in order to provide the necessities for maintaining our lives. Rather, he is emphasizing that all we have and all we need are supplied by God as we walk in faith and obedience to Him. And moreover, when the future seems bleak and troublesome, we can count on Him to supply our needs as He has promised.

... *but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving* – The words “in everything” make it clear that there is nothing which comes into our lives that is outside of the circle of God’s provision and care. In every situation, in every issue that confronts us, our God will aid us as we trust in Him and bring our lives under submission to His will. And we do this through prayer. It seems possible that Paul is using “prayer” (*προσευχή*, *proseuchē*) here as the overall definition of the access we have to God through Yeshua in all aspects of prayer. Then this broader term is narrowed by the word “supplication” (*δέησις*, *deēsis*), which means to request something from God. Then finally, he adds “with thanksgiving” (*μετὰ εὐχαριστίας*, *meta eucharistias*), indicating the true heart of faith which knows that God is attentive to our prayers and will always bring about what is best for us according to His loving and sovereign will.

Moreover, as Paul teaches us in his Epistle to the Romans, lack of gratitude characterizes those who are heading toward idolatry.

For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. (Rom 1:21)

Fee makes this good observation:

Thanksgiving is an explicit acknowledgment of creatureliness and dependence, a recognition that everything comes as gift, the verbalization before God of his goodness and generosity. If prayer as petition indicates their utter dependence on and trust in God, petition “accompanied by thanksgiving” puts both their prayer and their lives into proper theological perspective.¹

... *let your requests be made known to God.* – One might rightly ask why we would need to make our requests, our burdens, and even our praise and thanksgiving “known to God.” For surely the All-Knowing One comprehends all things and is in need of no one to inform Him. But Paul’s admonition here, a truism that runs through the pages of the Scriptures, emphasizes once again that our God is a relational God. He waits for His children to address Him, to worship Him, to honor and praise Him, and to make known to Him their love and adoration as well as their needs and problems. It is life with and in Him, by means of the Spirit, that more and more characterizes those who are His.

7 – And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Messiah Yeshua.

This verse begins with “And” which means it is directly linked to the previous context as showing the final and ultimate result of thankful prayer. God hears the prayers of His children and in their coming to Him, He not only meets their needs in accordance with His all wise plan and purpose, but He also strengthens them in their faith, enabling them to be brighter lights in this dark world.

The “peace of God” is the shalom which He possesses and gifts to those who are His, as Paul teaches us in Rom 5:1.

1 Gordon Fee, “Philippians” in *NICNT*, p. 410.

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Yeshua Messiah. (Rom 5:1)

This “peace” enables the sure and enduring knowledge that the believer possesses, knowing that they will never be rejected by Him but that they are secure in Him. This also means that when those who are His become wayward, He will discipline them as an act of His love, bringing them back to the path of righteousness.

For whom the Lord loves He reproveth, even as a father corrects the son in whom he delights. (Prov 3:12)

... *which surpasses all comprehension* – This phrase could mean that God’s peace is so great and so comprehensive that the human mind simply cannot grasp it completely. But more than likely Paul’s point here is that God’s peace is so beyond the ability of the unbelieving mind, and is therefore rejected by those who have no saving faith.

Of course, even believers are not able to comprehend the fulness of God’s greatness, which in this context includes the peace He gives to those who are His as their faith is deepened and becomes more and more that primary characteristic of their lives. Yet the “storehouse” of His peace cannot be measured. This means that here Paul is teaching us there is nothing we will face in our lives that can eclipse the gift of God’s peace as we commit ourselves to Him and grow strong in faith.

... *will guard your hearts and your minds in Messiah Yeshua.* – Paul uses a military term here to envision the manner in which God “guards” the heart of His child. The Greek word φρουρέω (*phroureō*) was used of those soldiers who “maintained a watch,” thus providing security over people and possessions.¹ The peace which God promises to the believer in Yeshua, experienced through a growing faith in who God is and what He has done to redeem those who are His, is that which guards the heart and mind of the believer, for by faith we believe that God is able to do all that He has promised, regardless of what may be our current circumstances.

In the Semitic world, the “heart” was considered the seat of one’s thoughts, commitments, faith, and decisions. The “heart” therefore was the governing factor in the area of obedience and growth in faith.

Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life. (Prov 4:23)

1 Cf. BDAG, “φρουρέω,” p. 1066.

The “mind” was considered the source of one’s physical life, and thus to “guard the mind” would have meant in the Semitic world to guard one’s whole being, that is, the final outcome of one’s life.

And all of this, ultimately, is summed up by Paul’s words, “in Messiah Yeshua.” It is our union with Him that not only secures our eternal life with Him but also enables us in our lives here to be His witnesses and those who give Him the honor He deserves, shining as lights in this darkened world.

8 – Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.

Paul used the same term, “Finally” (Τὸ λοιπόν, *to loipon*), in 3:1, where it clearly denotes “as for the rest” or “furthermore,” and does not indicate the coming to a close of his epistle. He may likewise be using this opening “finally” in our text to indicate the summing up of his immediate exhortations rather than signaling that he has finished his epistle. For in the immediate context we see Paul’s clear exhortations for believers in a given community to foster true friendship and unity.

In the previous context, he begins with “rejoice in the Lord always, again I will say, rejoice.” Here the very foundation for establishing a strong and vibrant community of faith is for each member to grow in affirming the goodness of God and that true rejoicing in all aspects of life flows from a growing dependence upon Him and rejoicing in all of His goodness.

Next he writes: “Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near.” Such a “gentle spirit” is that which desires unity and harmony, and is therefore careful and on guard against fostering a spirit of self centeredness and rather practicing what he admonishes us:

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; (Phil 2:3)

Next, in the previous context, Paul reminds us:

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. (Phil 4:6)