

Commentary on Philippians 4:2-14

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The **International Bible Lesson** (*Uniform Series*) for **August 22, 2010**, is from **Philippians 4:2-14**. Five **Questions for Discussion** follow the Bible Lesson Commentary. These are my preliminary verse by verse study notes before writing my Bible Lesson for *The Oklahoman* newspaper. They may help you in your class preparation and discussion. I do encourage you to write your own verse by verse notes and questions before reading the notes and questions below.

2 I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord.

These two Christian women were apparently not getting along in the church; so we learn that the church in Philippi had problems similar to some of our churches today, and the suggestions Paul gives are applicable today. They were members of the church, and Paul's letter suggests they were truly saved, for in verse 3, he wrote that their "names are in the book of life;" so, we learn that true Christians can have sincere disagreements. Their disagreements were not over the essentials of the Christian faith or Paul would have corrected one or the other of them or both to make certain the true gospel was not distorted.

3 Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.

Paul did not need to ask these women to agree with the essentials of the gospel, for they did. He did not take sides and ask one of the women to agree with the other woman. He did not ask them to both agree with him on the issue in dispute. He would want them to follow an eternal principle that we can all follow — come into agreement with Jesus Christ as He is presented to us in the Bible, agree with the way Christ thinks or would think in the situation. Sometimes we need to help others in the church come into agreement with Christ and not with us or one or the other.

4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.

Paul believed that we should help one another come into agreement with the Lord Jesus Christ, and when we achieve that goal we can rejoice. Rejoicing *together* in the Lord always ("always," meaning, "in any and every situation") can solve a multitude of problems and personality conflicts. If we are focusing on rejoicing in the Lord, we can more easily come to agreement on the thoughts of the Lord in daily situations and problem solving.

5 Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near.

When we disagree, or if we do, we can very easily become harsh in our words or in our tone of voice (even if we do not intend to do so). We can sometimes say what we would not otherwise say if the situation were different. We need to become known as a gentle person and work toward becoming a gentle person toward everyone, especially those in the church. The Lord is near, and He is watching what we say and do, and how we say things.

6 Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

Sometimes worry about our church, family, or culture can bring about disagreements needing to be resolved with kindness and trust in the Lord and His teaching and leading. To overcome worry, Paul said we should pray to God, and do so with thankful hearts. [see my *International Bible Lesson* on this verse, to be published on August 21, 2010, at <http://internationalbiblelessons.com>]

7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Telling God what you need while thanking God for what He has done and promised to do will replace worry with peace. The peace that God gives comes to us and abides with us in ways we can not understand, but we do experience peace that we know is not from ourselves but divinely imparted. God will protect us from losing our faith in Jesus Christ, if our faith is a real faith.

8 Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

Paul wrote that we need to think first about what is true (true about God, Jesus Christ, the gospel, the scriptures, reality, our existence, etc.), and this should inspire us to behave as Christ behaved on Earth. Doing what is honorable, just, pure, pleasing, commendable, excellent, worthy of praise comes from thinking about what these virtues mean and how to behave with these virtues in daily living, the Lord being our Helper.

9 Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

Paul taught as Jesus taught, by both word and example (the way all followers of Jesus should teach). The peace of God comes to us, not only by praying, trusting, and thinking, but also by doing, doing what is right as God gives us to see the

right. If we do the right based on having thought and prayed right, we will be given peace of mind, heart, and spirit. We also become a good example.

10 I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned for me, but had no opportunity to show it.

Paul always rejoiced in the Lord for everything and encouraged all believers to do that too, because the Lord is the One responsible for all good things that come to us, and for all the good things we think to do and do. Paul is thankful that this church became concerned for him and reached out to him — something he wrote tactfully — because he knew that the Lord had inspired them to do so and they did.

11 Not that I am referring to being in need; for I have learned to be content with whatever I have.

Paul knew that the Lord met all of his needs. Paul did suffer privations, but he learned to be content with whatever the Lord provided. He gave thanks to God for all that he had, whether or not it would “adequately” or “normally” meet his needs for food, clothing, and shelter, and he kept on praying for the Lord to meet his needs. God helped him through the Philippians and others.

12 I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need.

Paul wrote more specifically in this verse. He had “little” from time to time, but never “nothing.” He had “something,” plus the presence of his loving Lord and Savior, who gave him peace beyond understanding, at all times. His secret was to keep loving and serving his Lord Jesus Christ at all times and in every situation: his secret was totally depending on Jesus Christ as he served Him in plenty and in want.

13 I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

Paul wrote this verse, often memorized by Christians, because he and we have the experience of knowing that when we have “little,” we can keep going because Christ will strengthen us and enable us to get through our situation with “enough.” Paul never took the provision of Christ’s strength for granted when he was “well-fed,” for he remembered that all his provisions came from the Lord Jesus Christ and were to be received with thanksgiving.

14 In any case, it was kind of you to share my distress.

Paul does thank the Christians in Philippi for helping him, and he does admit that he was in distress and they shared his distress when they provided for him.

Paul prayed, and then God moved the Philippians to help him; so, Jesus Christ receives all the glory and thanksgiving for moving the Philippians to both care for and then practically help Paul. Jesus Christ works the same way today, and He will do the same in our individual lives and in our church when we trust and pray and obey. “Trust and obey, for there is no other way to be happy in Jesus.”

Five Questions for Discussion

1. Can you think of two people in your church or family who have a deep disagreement (or disagreements)? Do you think Paul’s suggestions (or the suggestions in the commentary) for helping Euodia and Syntyche would help these two people to come into agreement? Why or why not? Take time to pray for these people.
2. Whose names are written in the book of life? How can one come to have their name written in the book of life? Why is this important?
3. What kinds of disagreements can come between those whose names are written in the book of life and those whose names are not written in the book of life? Think of those who crucified Jesus, and persecuted Stephen, and Paul. What are some examples of these kinds of disagreements today? What is the solution? What was the solution for Paul when he persecuted Christians?
4. What is the difference between being gentle and being a sissy? Why is being gentle so difficult that Paul had to write and encourage those in the church to be gentle? When an opponent confuses being gentle with being weak in the one he opposes, what can happen? How should a gentle person respond to an opponent?
5. What thoughts would you like to add on prayer and how to overcome the temptations to worry? What ideas do you find the most helpful when you try to stop worrying?

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