

Philippians 10-09-10a

This is Friday, the 10th of September, 2010, and we are in the book of Philippians, chapter 4. We pick up in verse 7 and 8 tonight. We'll take a moment as we begin to exercise our privilege of going before the Lord individually, acknowledging our sins, asking his blessing on us as we seek to concentrate and spend time together in fellowship and the study of God's word. Father, we are grateful for this time of study and the opportunity to learn and grow in our understanding of your word.

We thank you for all of the provisions that you have made, both in the historical past and in our own lives, to bring us to this point where we have the freedom and the resources to seek a better grasp of the principles that guide our daily lives and that inform us and equip us to fulfill the things that you have assigned us as tasks in the time that remains to us on this earth. We ask your blessing on us as we study, as we converse, as we spend time together this evening, and in the hours and days ahead that the truth we perceive tonight and come to grips with will become part of the resources and strengthening structure of our souls so that we can, in fact, live a supernatural life, a life that reflects your glory and the glory of the Lord Jesus. We ask it in his name, amen.

You'll remember that Philippians is largely a book about the unity of believers, joy in that fellowship, and the mindset that undergirds that fellowship and that unity. I think that's about as succinctly as I can summarize the content of this letter. And we think, okay, when I'm not looking at my Bible and when I'm not in church or in Bible class, how does this actually pertain? And there is a beauty in the simplicity of Paul's theme, Paul's message.

We should be together. We should be united. We should be one with fellow believers, not just any old fellow believers, but fellow believers who are close to the Lord Jesus, who share his understanding of the Father's plan and purpose.

Not that we fully comprehend it, but we've got some of the main points. We're following in his footsteps. We are trying to travel that narrow road that leads to the straight gate of life, and we're trying to go through.

We're trying to be consistent. If that is our ambition, we're a Christian, lots of different brands and flavors of Christianity, hundreds of different denominations, lots of different ways to identify or to try to live as a Christian. What does the Bible say we're supposed to do if we're going to live as a Christian? It's easy to sing the gospel song, I'm saved and I know that I am, but how does that play out? To what extent am I different than the person in the next cubicle, the person sitting at the next desk, the person driving in the car in the lane beside me? Am I any different? Particularly, and especially for us, if we know the Word of God so well as we like to think we do, we've learned all kinds of neat things from it, we've explored it at some depth, we've been practically spiritual spelunkers in some cases, we've gone down into those dark recesses to bring

up the treasures that are contained therein, remember that passage.

So, was it worthwhile? Did it do anything? It may be intellectually stimulating, it may be kind of a fun thing to do at the time, but what is the result? I have been recently thinking about how you evaluate leadership, whether it's in an organization, whether it's the leadership of the country, whether it's historical leadership of a church, whether it is historical leadership of almost any entity, military, civil, corporate, even individual, leadership in a family or whatever. How do you evaluate leadership? You can go to individual episodes or how individual circumstances or crises or challenges or tasks were handled and say good or bad. Just to give you a for instance, I think about the presidency of Ronald Reagan that was going on in my somewhat early adult life and he was there for eight years and I thought he was a good guy, I voted for him despite the fact that he had been an actor and was from California, which to me is two strikes against you right there, and I can say that I'm from California too.

I voted for him and I supported him and I agreed with him. How does history judge? How does anybody judge? How can you fairly judge leadership, whether or not his presidency was a well-done thing? I can point to specific things where I think he utterly and totally failed and other places where I think he completely and spectacularly succeeded. Is that a wash then? Does he just get a C grade because he did a few things badly and other things well? How do you evaluate? I'm not even going to try to answer that question, but I think you have to do more than listen to the press on any presidency, including the current one.

You can't just hear what you want to hear and disregard the rest. You have to seek out facts and qualified, balanced analysis of those facts when they're in areas that we don't have any expertise. Did President Reagan do a good thing by outspending the Soviet Union so that he ended the Cold War because they basically ran out of money and ran out of willpower and they collapsed like a bad souffle? He did that, but he did it by spending enormous amounts of money and running up our national debt.

Was that a good thing or a bad thing? It depends. Some people say, well, he knew that we had the ability, this is kind of like buying your house with a mortgage. You lay out a big check up front and then you've got to repay it over time and that's basically what he did.

Did he mortgage the future? Well, yes he did, but it was a really great investment and in practically no time. You remember by the time his predecessor had been in office a few years, we were doing really well economically because of the momentum, I think, that was established in the past. But I'm not here to talk about that, I'm here to talk about us and how do we judge how well we're doing? What is the success or failure? What is the judgment on our spiritual life? Paul in the Philippian letter is talking to a group like us, people that are interested, people that are motivated, but yet people still have some problems and some failures and one of their problems was getting along.

So Paul has spent a lot of time talking about the things that unify us and a lot of it goes back to perspective. But here's the answer to my question. What is the best way to evaluate? Do you go to individual? Anybody can find something to criticize.

There is not a person, there is not an entity, there is not a thing that can't be criticized. People criticized God, people criticized Jesus Christ, criticized him in his own lifetime and he was perfect. So it's not hard to come up with a criticism if you're looking for it.

And so you can't say, well, whatever gets the least amount of criticism, that must be a good thing. We need an objective standard of evaluation. That's what the Word of God gives us.

What do we evaluate? Do we evaluate little individual episodes? If you want to make a decision about whether or not to move to the Bahamas, do you get little spot checks of weather and, well, they were having a hurricane on this particular day so I don't want to move to the Bahamas. Well, that's really not representative. We need something representative and ultimately it's results.

We judge things based on results, however, how did you get those results? Hey, I got a hundred on the test. I did cheat, but I got a hundred. It's not just simply results.

The end does not justify the means. I'll do whatever it takes to get a hundred. Obviously that doesn't work either.

We have said many times, looking at our favorite example, John the Baptist, that just because it ends badly in a beheading, that doesn't mean that you did something wrong. We have to know what kind of results to look for. For John the Baptist, which result do you want to look at? Do you want to look at the fact that he got his head cut off and died early or do you want to look at the words of the Lord Jesus, of man born of woman, there is none greater than John.

So, almost anything you say in this regard has to be qualified. This is why we study the word of God. This is why we have the book of Philippians.

This is why we have the Philippian letter. And in a nutshell, to boil down everything I've said for the last ten minutes, this letter tells us as believers what is important, what the measure of success is as a Christian. If we can fulfill what Paul lays out in Philippians, we will stand at the judgment seat of Christ.

This is the description of the successful believer. And we will notice as we review what we've covered, which I'm not going to do, but if you think back to what we've covered in the first three chapters, it's all about results. What kind of attitude do you have? Do you have the attitude that was in Christ Jesus? Are you consistent? Are you faithful? Are you looking out for the interests of others? This is a result.

You might have an internal struggle when something first comes up. You may have a horrible

rash of mental attitude sins that you have to wrestle down and you've got to bite your tongue and you've got to go to God and cycle some scriptural truth through your soul. But what is the result? What do you ultimately do? What do you ultimately say? How do you ultimately behave? Do you leave the group or do you stick with the group? Do you encourage or do you discourage? What is your ultimate effect? So the reason all this is important is we are getting to the finally my brethren section of the of the letter.

And he's already said Taloipan once and he's going to say it again. But in in the first part of chapter four, we saw that it really sort of begins in in verse two and we saw this schism that had developed between two godly women, two coworkers, yoke fellows in the gospel with Paul. And obviously there was a pretty big problem in the church that Paul would actually call their names and send Epaphroditus and encourage him publicly in the letter to help them resolve their differences.

But it's that important. And Paul knows these people well enough. I saw one comment made that that Paul could not have taken this tack or said these things to just any church.

And but he could do it to the Philippians. And there was something to the effect that he knew because of the love that was in that group, that love was like pillows that would cushion the blow of such a forthright address of this problem. And, you know, love suffers long.

Love covers a multitude of sins. Love does not seek its own. Love is patient.

All of those things in First Corinthians 13. And because of that, occasionally when you have to be direct, as Paul is here, you can do this with the mature because love is going to bind together that which in a weaker situation might fracture. So he took that strong tack and we looked at that last time.

He concluded that by saying, rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I will say rejoice. Let your flexibility be known to all men.

The Lord is in goose. The Lord is near e.g. U.S. Is it spatially near or chronologically near? And the answer is yes. So now in verse six, he says, be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.

And we have four different words here that pertain to prayer. And this is where we pick up tonight. And to tie back into my introductory thought, prayer is one of the most underutilized parts of our spiritual life.

Prayer is conversation with God. It's our side of the conversation. He speaks through his word by means of the Holy Spirit to us.

Holy Spirit takes this 66 book collection here in English and brings to our minds and brings to our hearts those particular portions that are uniquely and especially applicable to us at the moment,

at the time, in the circumstance that we need. The more we know of it and the better we understand it, the more easily the Holy Spirit is going to be able to minister those things to our hearts and our minds. That's God's side of the conversation.

But one-sided conversation gets boring for both sides sooner or later. And we have our end to hold up. We should be speaking.

We should be reflecting. We should be acknowledging and expressing things. And God is going to wait sometimes.

Excuse me. Anybody that has raised a child knows that if you're trying to encourage growth and thinking and wisdom, you do it by questions that require thought to answer and that you can ask leading questions. This is part of the Socratic method.

If you ever saw *The Paper Chase*, I recently watched again, probably for the third or fourth time, the original movie from which the PBS series was taken back in the early 70s sometime. But John Houseman is the quintessential law professor, and he announces at the beginning of the class that this is his teaching method. He will posit something and he will expect a response.

It is initiation and response. And this is an effective way to teach and a very effective way for students to learn. This is what God does with us.

How many times have we seen Jesus or God himself come into a situation and the first thing he does is ask a question? Adam and Eve in the garden, Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus with his disciples time and time again asking a question. Could you not watch with me one hour? Why are you where you are? Who do men say that I am? Who do you say that I am? Look at all of the interrogatives in the speech of Jesus. Why? Because it forces us to think.

The Word of God raises questions even as it answers others and we should respond. This is prayer. Prayer requires thought.

It requires meditation. It requires analysis and digesting and processing and drawing of conclusions from what we have learned. It is the lazy man.

It is the lazy woman who does not pray. Because prayer does require some effort. If you do it properly, if you do it in the way that God expects, and this is not an option, it's not, well, if you get in a jam, feel free to pray.

Pray without ceasing. It's an imperative. And so we have here, in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.

You've got four different aspects of prayer really covered here. Prayer in general, supplication, which is very close to prayer. These are almost interchangeable terms.

With thanksgiving, this is a particular kind of prayer, a prayer expressing gratitude, expressing appreciation, expressing an understanding of what has been done on one's behalf by grace and requests, petitions. All of these are components. All of these are facets of prayer.

And then in verse seven, there is a result. This is sort of a prothesis, apothesis. If you fulfill the prothesis, if you fulfill prayer by making prayer and supplication with thanksgiving and letting your requests be known, the result, the other side of that is the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

If we have a problem with peace, if we can't get settled, doesn't mean that we don't feel pressure, doesn't mean that we don't recognize challenge. It doesn't mean that we are not engaged in the wrestling match with principalities and powers, but you can do these things in a peaceful way, meaning you are not in a panic. You're not unsettled.

You're not disturbed. You're not roiled up. Your heart is not troubled.

Jesus tells them, let not your heart be troubled. You need to have peace. We know when we have peace and we know when we don't.

Looking at a thing, maybe make a tentative decision, a prospective decision, a provisional decision in some area. We start going down that road and we don't have peace. It doesn't settle.

We constantly return to it. We can't, we're not reconciled to it. It doesn't, it doesn't seem to fit.

It's got a sharp edge. It's like having a lump in your mattress. It's like having a rock in your shoe.

It's like having your hat on too tight. It's like having your hair pulled back too tight. You just can't get away from it.

No matter what you do, it just comes back. It's like too much Italian food. You know, it just keeps coming back on you hour after hour.

And you think, Whoa, I can't get away from this. That's not peace. There is no peace, saith my God to those who are involved in that, which is not good.

And that's one of the reasons we cannot have peace. But look at this. If you are not anxious about anything, be anxious about nothing.

It's kind of an awkwardness in English. It makes beautiful Greek. But in English, you know, does this mean I should worry about vacuums and, you know, be anxious about nothing? What if I die? And it's just nothing.

Should I be anxious? What it means is don't be anxious about anything. But in Greek, they express it the opposite way. You know how many things you should be anxious about? Zero,

none.

That means none, but in everything. And the nothing everything should tie together. If you don't mind marking your Bible, circle nothing and circle everything.

And that's why you should not be anxious about anything, because to the extent that you are careful about or anxious about, full of care about something, you are not someone who is committed to God through prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, making a request. If you had genuinely done that, you would not be anxious about it. And the act of prayer itself stabilizes our mind, calms our nerves.

That's what these verses tell us. Do you want to be released from worry? Do you want to be released from this merino sort of cycling that goes on? It just keeps circling. It's just like a black crow that just keeps flying around your mind.

And just when you think it's out of sight, here it comes again. I'm not going to think about that two minutes later. That's all you're thinking about.

We release ourselves from anxiety and worry and inordinate concern by prayer. If you're going to be anxious about nothing, you have to take it out of the worry basket and put it in the prayer basket. Everything should be prayed about so that it's not in the care basket.

It's going to be in one or the other. Anxious about nothing because I've taken everything that concerns me in that way to God in prayer. Prayer and supplication with thanksgiving.

One of the things that is exceedingly difficult for us to remember is when we're in the grip of a concern. It's easy to be thankful when everything is great. Walking along, sunny afternoon, cool breeze blowing, I'm happy, zippity-doo-dah, everything's going my way.

Then we can be thankful. But your tire goes flat in the middle of a rainstorm and there's no shoulder on the road. There's traffic whizzing back and forth and you've got wife and small child in the vehicle.

And is that the time to say, oh, Lord, thank you? I'm saying, oh, Lord, please don't let us all get smacked. Oh, let us don't all be, you know, jellified before we get a chance to fix this problem. Actually, that episode was total loss of electricity rather than a flat tire.

The electrical system in our vehicle went dark, totally, utterly and completely powerless. In the middle of the night, on a busy, that was a concern generating situation. And my first thought was, what can I give God thanks for? Thanks that we haven't been smacked yet.

But actually, as I ran the, whatever it was, mile and a half back to the last signs of civilization, I thanked God that I was young and in good enough shape to make that trek since there was no way to flag down any traffic. And there was no, as I prayed, you know, please keep the wife and

child safe and so on. And I was sprinting back for help and thankful that it wasn't any further back than it was.

There are some stretches that are a lot longer than that. But it is mind settling because it forces you to remember that God is in charge. That God has made provision in other circumstances.

That even in this circumstance, there are provisions that have been made. We have not been tested above what we were able to bear and we can be thankful for that. This is not as bad as it could be.

I may have lost something, but I haven't lost everything. I may be taxed in this area, but I'm not taxed in this other area. I'm not stretched.

I'm not to the breaking point in multiple areas beyond what I can bear. There are areas where, thankfully, I'm not being taxed at this present time. I'm not being tested and challenged.

It's just this one area. In everything, give thanks for this is the will of God concerning you. I'll give you that reference here in a moment.

But that's the idea here. It's throughout the Old Testament. It is throughout the New Testament.

You can do a lexicon search, do a concordance search on Thanksgiving. It is all over the Bible, as you well know. A lot of us have memorized Psalm 100.

Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye land. Serve the Lord with gladness. Come before his presence with singing.

Know ye that the Lord, he is God. It is he that hath made us and not we ourselves. We are his people and the sheep of his pasture.

Enter into his gates with thanksgiving. When you enter the gates, come in with thanksgiving. Enter his courts with praise.

Be thankful unto him and bless his name. Why? For the Lord is good. His mercy is everlasting and his truth endures to all generations.

Be thankful unto him and bless his name. It doesn't say when you're feeling good, when the heat's off, be thankful. In everything, give thanks.

In everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving. And actually, looking at the Greek syntax here, I would put the commas in a different place. I place commas for a living these days.

And this ought to say, in my opinion, my parsing of the Greek, and I'm sure I could find some commentator that would agree with me. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and supplication. And then it says, with thanksgiving, comma, let your request, by prayer and

supplication, comma, with thanksgiving, comma, let your request be made known.

I would suggest strike out the comma after thanksgiving, because the way this is constructed in Greek, it says, by prayer and supplication, comma, and those two are kind of a pair. They're almost synonymous. It's really emphasis by restatement of the same idea.

With thanksgiving, let your request be made known. Let your request be made known with thanksgiving. You can almost justify moving the phrase with thanksgiving after made known.

In everything, by prayer and supplication, let your request be made known with thanksgiving to God, because the with thanksgiving idea is tied to making the request. Don't make a request that is not accompanied by thanks. You can pray and give thanks, or you can pray and not.

But if you're going to make a request, don't make a request without accompanying thanksgiving. That's the idea. And why would that be? Well, think about it this way.

A little child comes into the kitchen. Mom, where's my lunch? Mom, give me a sandwich. Mom, I want some pudding.

How much more likely would any such desire be in terms of fulfillment if the child came in and said, I really appreciate when you make me lunch. May I have some lunch? That pudding you make is so delicious. Could I have another helping? Even in the human realm, we understand how nice it is that what we have already done is appreciated before we're asked to do something else.

Come in and see this. I know from experience how to fail at this spectacularly, because I can come in and somebody has been at work cleaning a room, perhaps for quite a period of time. And I've been elsewhere.

And I come in and I see three things that are not in place. And I say, somebody do something about thing one and thing two and thing three. Instead of saying, wow, this room looks great.

You all have done a wonderful job. There's just a couple of things that would make it perfect. It would just go down, you know, like Julie Andrews, spoonful of sugar type of thing.

But everybody, including the Lord God in heaven, appreciate being appreciated. And it is a spectacularly dumb thing to come in and sort of make demands without recognizing and appreciating what has already been done. And this verse specifically, unequivocally says, don't talk to God about what you want if you're not going to thank him for what he's already given you.

And it's understandable. But don't let the comma fool you. I would take that comma out with Thanksgiving.

Let your requests be made known. Don't be coming into the throne room of God and making

demands. It's literally where angels fear to tread, be thankful unto him and bless his name.

The Lord is good. His mercy is everlasting. His truth endures.

But don't just be schlepping in there saying, Oh God, I need this right now where we are. We are exploiting and taking advantage of our status as children when we do that. And it just makes us appear to be very small children.

Indeed, toddlers wandering in with leaky diapers and unwashed hands and faces without manners, without wisdom, without maturity, making this sort of immature approach. If you've got a concern, if we have a care, if we have a need, prayer and supplication with Thanksgiving, we come and make a request. And when we have done that, and because we have done that, and part of it is because Thanksgiving is a necessary component of any request, forcing us to remember what it is we are thankful for automatically starts.

It's like priming the pump of peace. Our peace will be like a river. Remember the hymn, like a river glorious.

What's the next line? Is God's perfect peace overall victorious in its bright increase, perfect yet it floweth fuller every day and so on. I may have mixed one line in there, but you get the idea. It is the peace of God that passes all understanding, that keeps our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

And it passes understanding. This is something that goes beyond rationalization. Oh, I don't have to worry because I don't have to worry that I'm short of money today because my check will hit the bank tomorrow.

That's not a peace that passes understanding. That's an understandable peace. I'm not worried because I know that the answer is on its way.

The world, the unbeliever, the immature believer can rationalize peace. Where do you get peace that goes beyond the rational, that goes beyond what you can construct in your mind by thought processes? If it passes understanding, it is a supernatural peace. It is a gift of peace that doesn't come by manufacture.

It doesn't come by stacking ideas. It doesn't come by reaching out for pieces of tangible comfort. God grants his peace.

And you notice in verse seven, it says the peace of God. We have some scriptures that say the peace of God and we have others that say the God of peace. The very first thing in this letter, we hadn't got two verses into it before Paul said, grace to you and peace from God, our father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

We talked about it a little bit at that time. Jesus said in John 14, 27, peace, I leave with you. My peace, I give to you.

Not as the world gives, do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. And that's the same way he began chapter 14.

Let not your heart be troubled. I am giving you my peace. It's not like the peace you get from the world.

It's not the peace you get from a step program or a mentor or a book or, you know, pan pipe music or, you know, a happy pill or anything else. This is a supernatural peace. That pan pipe music, don't even get me started.

John 16, 33, these things I have spoken to you that in me, you may have peace. And another, as long as I'm amending or suggesting inundations to your Bible, let me suggest another one in Philippians 4, 7, when it says, we'll guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. This is a Greek preposition.

And it's the very same one you have in John 16, 33. It's in Christ Jesus. When you guard a thing, and that's what this, this verb means, it's translated guard, perfectly good word.

It means to guard, to keep, to, to secure a thing. Well, I, I guard a compound. I guard something that's enclosed.

I guard something that's, that's in a, in a place. And I keep it there and I make sure nothing gets in to harm it. The peace of God will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

If your heart and mind is in Christ Jesus, this peace will guard it there and keep it there and preserve it there. If your heart and mind is outside Jesus, this peace isn't going to do any good. This peace is going to guard you in Christ Jesus.

It's a qualifier to the extent that your heart is in Christ Jesus. This peace will guard you there and keep you there. If you can't keep your mind on Christ, if you can't keep your heart in Christ, this peace isn't going to pertain.

It's not going to affect us in Christ Jesus. I don't know where they get through. Dea is through.

This is not Dea. This is in, in. I know where they get it.

You can translate in as by means of, but keep your hearts and minds by means of Christ Jesus, it doesn't fit. It will guard you in Christ Jesus. It will help keep you in Christ Jesus.

You're already there and you can stay there, but you have to get there before you can be guarded by God's peace. So it's a powerful admonition here, a powerful imperative. Don't be anxious.

Don't be anxious and the whole idea of Merim Nao in Greek, this care or anxiety is it's a wearing

thing. Merim Nao, it just, it's repetitive. It's, it's abrasive.

It chafes. It just, uh, where it, it, it, it presses on you. He says, don't let anything do that.

Take it to God in prayer with Thanksgiving, make your requests and God will send a super rational peace, super rational above and beyond understanding in Christ Jesus. Well, this brings us to verse eight. And interestingly, you remember when we started, uh, chapter three, we had finally, my brethren, Taloipan as for the rest.

And that's usually kind of the concluding thing. And then it says, Oh, Paul came back and he said, well, wait a minute. I'm not kind of prematurely introduced my conclusion.

Well, now he's really going to introduce his conclusion. And so he says Taloipan again. So we have two finalists.

So there was a semi-final and now there's a final final here in verse eight, finally, my brethren, and we have memorized this verse. So we're going to pause here and take our break. When we come back, we're going to see that what we have memorized as great as it is, doesn't really convey what Paul says here.

And I think we'll all be fascinated to see what this verse actually says. This verse and the next, uh, I, I didn't see it coming. I doubt that you see it coming, but when we get there, you'll think, boy, that makes just such great sense.

I'm surprised I didn't see it coming. So that's where we'll pick up when we come back from the break.