

## Philippians 4:4-7

Early in the book of Philippians Paul declared, “**For me to live is Christ and to die is gain.**” Throughout the letter Paul shared what it means to be a Christian. As he neared the end of the letter he gave a brief overview of some of the characteristics of the Christian life.

The first characteristic of a Christian is that he or she, according to verse 4 is to “**rejoice in the Lord always, I will say it again, rejoice!**” This is a command, not a request or suggestion. Christians ought to be the happiest people on earth. God never intended fun and laughter to be crowded out of our lives and in fact tells us what the key to such joy is. Jesus related the relationship with the Father as similar to a wedding feast, which was always fun. God rejoices when a single soul comes to the Lord. In I Thessalonians 5:16 we are told to be **joyful always**. Joy is one characteristic that should be evident in every Christian life.

Joy is the outward expression of an inner peace that comes from the assurance that God has everything under control. An infectious joy goes far in convincing the world that Christianity is real. No matter what outward circumstances we might find ourselves in it is possible, and important, to be sure that the joy in the Lord is evident. The first characteristic of a Christian is **joy**.

In verse 5 we have the second characteristic of a Christian life. Paul wrote, “**Let your gentleness be evident to all.**” **Gentleness** is an unusual word that can be translated as “patience”, “softness”, “modesty”, and “forbearance.” It carried the sense of acting beyond pure justice when the circumstances also warranted mercy and understanding. Gentleness, mercy, or patience, or however you translate it, is a characteristic of God and one of the **Fruit of the Spirit** that should characterize our Christian walk. It carries the idea of graciously giving another your rights. We who have known the gentleness of God because of Jesus ought to always be ready to show the same gentleness or patience to others. When we are tempted to say “they don’t deserve to be shown such” we should recall that it was while we were sinners that Jesus died for us. Christians are different because of what God has done for them and one of those differences is the ability to be gentle in our relationship with others.

The reason for being joyful and gentle is that **the Lord is near**. The term carries, first of all, the concept of time, The Lord’s coming is near in time. In New Testament times that reminded the Christians not only to be ready for His return but that when He comes He will vindicate His own. Second, it carries the idea of space. It means that the Lord is near to us wherever we are. He is always close and His return, from a heavenly perspective, is near. That is a call to be prepared and to live accordingly.

The third characteristic of a Christian is found in verse 6 where we read, Christians are **not to be anxious about anything**. Like the characteristic of joyfulness, this is a command. Literally it means, “stop worrying.” Why not be anxious? Because the Lord is near. Read Jesus’ teaching on this in Matthew 6:25-34. In the world there is a great deal of uncertainty but, because Jesus is

close to us and is going to return, we need not be anxious. Being anxious is the opposite of rejoicing and the opposite of trusting the ever present and soon returning Lord. When we do not trust God, we become anxious. When we know He is there, we not only lack anxiousness but possess joy. This is not an argument for pretending there is nothing to be concerned about but it's a challenge to live above worry because of the One who is with us and all He has promised to do in us and for us.

How do we overcome the worry that seems so necessary and unavoidable? Paul wrote that it is by being sure that we take **everything by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving and present it to our God**. The little word “**everything**” is important to see. Nothing is too big for an all-powerful God. Nothing is too insignificant for Him who loves and cares for us. Prayer is the alternative to worry.

Paul used 3 different words here to describe prayer. The first is the common word for simply talking to God. The second carries the idea of presenting our needs to Him. The third has the idea of reflecting back on what has been asked for and all He has done for us. The important emphasis is on prayer. We are to live lives of prayer with the assurance that the God who is near will hear and answer. The element of thanksgiving is important to see and may be the key word because you cannot give thanks and continue to worry. Begin by giving God thanks for His presence in the difficulties, trials, hardships, and suddenly worry disappears. You cannot give thanks and worry at the same time. Paul was saying, “Do not worry about anything because you have taken everything to God in prayer.”

Finally, the Christian life is characterized by peace, **and the peace of God**. In John 14:27 we read that Jesus is leaving His peace with His disciples. It is His peace and He gives it not as the world gives it. It is a peace that is beyond our imaginations. The Greek carries the idea of being a peace that we could never conceive of or initiate ourselves. God has to give it. The “**and**” literally means ‘as a consequence of’ or “because of your prayers” you will know this incredible peace.

Paul was not talking about peace with God as a result of salvation. Elsewhere Paul noted that as sinners we are literally at war with God and have no peace but when we come to Him in faith and accept the salvation that is offered in Jesus we are made right with God and literally have peace with God where there was once enmity. That is essential because one can never have any of the characteristics of a Christian without that step of faith. Joy, gentleness, a lack of being anxious, and peace that passes all understanding are available only to those who belong to Him. But the word used here is not that of peace with God but a word that carries the idea of an inner peace that comes from God to the soul. It is the nature of God given to us because He is near and responds to our prayers.

Paul described this peace in verse 7 as that which “**transcends all understanding**.” That phrase is open to several translations including being beyond human understanding or surpassing what our human minds can comprehend. When the world looks at us, in what they would consider the

most trying or difficult of times, and discovers we have peace, they cannot understand it. Even when we try to explain it, it is beyond words. The idea also implies a peace that produces that which is beyond what we could have come up with on our own. Turning our worries over to God is the only way to real peace. When we take our cares to Him in prayer He has a way of assuring us that He is in control. That gives to us a peace that we would not have even imagined possible, let alone know how to achieve it ourselves.

How does God give us that peace? Verse 7 continues, it **“guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”** Literally, He stands garrison over our hearts. God is not subject to anxiety as we are and when we trust Him and take all of our cares to Him in prayer and thanksgiving He sets Himself up as the shield against unrest, tension, or fear because such cannot exist in Him or get through Him to us.

Notice what is guarded. First, it places His protective peace and assurance over our hearts. The term **“heart”** is most often used in the New Testament to refer to the seat of emotions as well as our source of thought and moral choice. His peace gives us emotional tranquility. It guards our emotions or deepest feelings. And it guards our **“minds”** or our thoughts and thought process. We hear Him say, “It’s OK, I am with you.” His peace overshadows our emotions, our moral choices, and our thoughts. What more could we ask for?

As Christians we are different, even a peculiar group of individuals because we know what life is all about. Christians are different because in a world that is seemingly falling apart, we have joy. In a world where the prevailing philosophy is get the other guy before he gets you, we know gentleness and show it to others. Christians are different because in a world that seems so uncertain and unstable we know Him who is the same yesterday, today, and forever and therefore we are not anxious. We are different because in a world that needs drugs, alcohol and more toys to bring even a measure of peace, we have a peace that passes our ability to understand it because we have the God of peace within. We are different and how glorious that is. Those differences are to be celebrated and to be recognized each day.