

Philippians 4:1-9

Stand firm... Having warned against the dangers of the Epicurean Christians, it is surely this kind of compromise that Paul has in mind. *In the Lord...* The standing is not done on one's own strength, but "in Christ."

Beloved... (agapetoi x2/ agapetoi mou) This affectionate language is usually found in the letters of John, but here we see how deeply Paul cares for this community of Christians.

I entreat x2...Euodia and Syntche... Here is a model for bold and caring Pastoral ministry. Paul names each leader by name (both women) without embarrassing them or shaming them.

Agree... to auto phronein: literally, "have the same mind." While some have interpreted this call as a call to doctrinal agreement, in the context of the letter we must keep in mind when similar language is used (Phil. 2:5). The thrust of that passage is not to require agreement, but a call to humility. Some have wondered if the preceding sections of the letter have all been leading to this moment when Paul addresses a particular disagreement in the community.

Partner... Syzygus...the identity of this figure (interpreted "partner") is mysterious. Some have wondered if Syzygus is the name of a fellow Christian (Karl Barth believed so), as the word literally means "loyal yokefellow." The problem with this interpretation is that we have no evidence of Syzygus being used as a proper name.

Disconnected Maxims "There must have been a completely concrete link which we lack the power to reconstruct." Karl Barth, *Epistle to the Philippians*

Rejoice... Rather than a call to an emotional high, rejoicing is a matter of resilience knowing that we are "in Christ."

Let your reasonableness... (epieikes) While it is a common interpretation, interpreting epieikes as "reasonableness" is not a very good one. Better translations could be forbearance (Lightfoot), patience, or gentleness. Others suggest "grace under pressure."

The Lord is at hand... We feel the tension of Christian life: Christ is present with us and in us, and he is still to come.

Do not be anxious... "abnormal fears and phobias that are expressed in neurotic anxiety may be cured by psychiatry; but the fear of death, nonbeing, and nothingness, expressed in existential anxiety, may be cured only by a positive religious faith." Martin Luther King Jr., *Testament of Hope*

By prayer and supplication with thanksgiving... Prayers (requests) are offered with thanksgiving (eucharistias). They must be held in tension with one another, bringing the needs of the community to God.

The peace of God... the peace of God is a present experience rooted in future promises of God, because that future broke into our present when Jesus Christ rose from the dead.

Keep your hearts and minds... keep "phouresi," carries connotations of protection and preservation, and has its origins in the military. "It depicts God's peace as a detachment of soldiers standing guard over a city so as to protect it from attack." Hawthorne, *Philippians*

Finally... This word introduces one of the most moving passages in the New Testament. But, how do these virtues cohere? Are they gifts that God gives, attributes of God? How do they relate to Jesus and the Holy Spirit? Are they relative or absolute, or both? Whatever the case may be, Paul wants Christians to interpret these qualities in light of the Gospel.

Whatever is true... “the triune God, the incarnation of Christ, a life of love, resurrection hope—all these set the terms for reflecting on ‘whatever is true.’” Hunsinger

Whatever is honorable... “Whatever is honorable is forever stamped with a cruciform seal.” Hunsinger

Whatever is just/righteous... Justice is joined to mercy in Jesus Christ. The word translated as just is the word “diakai,” which could also mean righteous. Again, we see a foundation for the proper interpretation of the term in God.

Whatever is pure/holy... the word “hagna” is closely related to the term “holy.”

Whatever is lovely... “He is beautiful as God, the Word with God...He then is beautiful in heaven, beautiful on earth; beautiful in the womb, beautiful in his parents’ arms; beautiful in miracles; beautiful under the scourge; beautiful when inviting life; beautiful also when not regarding death; beautiful in laying down his life; beautiful in taking it up again; beautiful on the cross; beautiful in the sepulchre; beautiful in heaven.” From a sermon by St. Augustine

Whatever is commendable... “hosa euphema: what is well spoken of...”

Theological Reflection: “what emerges when these marks of excellence are considered from a center in Christ...is again the primacy of cultic atonement modes of thought. Neither the moral nor the forensic, neither the apocalyptic nor the messianic, in themselves, can capture the full weight of whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, and well spoken of in Christ. They are all finally determined by the merciful substitution of the cross.” Hunsinger

Excellence...worthy of praise... Excellence summarizes the markers in the list of virtues, praise summarizes the adequate response.

Learned...received...heard...seen in me... Paul’s ministry makes the content of these virtues visible. Again – because it rightly makes us uncomfortable to hear a Pastor speak this way – it helps to consider the importance of embodied ministry in a context where few can read, and few know the Scriptures.

Practice these things... Contemplation (thinking) leads to action.

The God of peace will be with you... “Shalom means universal flourishing, wholeness, and delight – a rich state of affairs in which natural needs are satisfied and natural gifts fruitfully employed, a state of affairs that inspires joyful wonder as its Creator and Savior opens doors and welcomes the creatures in whom he delights.” Cornelius Plantinga, *Not the Way It’s Supposed to Be*. Plantinga’s title suggests the meaning of “peace” in Scripture: the way it’s supposed to be. “The faithful cannot be witnesses to Christ without becoming a people of shalom who struggles against the culture of death in all its forms.” Hunsinger