

Week 9

Philippians 4:2-9

Celebrate in the Lord!

- I. Prayer
- II. Opening Question
 - How do you deal with disagreement?
- III. Read N.T. Wright Commentary p. 128-132
- IV. Scan Aesthetic Commentary p.197-222
- V. Discussion Questions
 - a. How do you deal with disagreement? Where/when did you learn this behavior?
 - b. What could have happened in the Philippian church if the two women had not resolved their dispute?
 - c. What, for you, is the difference between “going to” church, “being part of” a church and “being church?” Which description most accurately depicts your experience of contemporary Christ followers?
 - d. What difference is there between arguments within the Church and arguments between a Christ follower and someone outside the Church?
 - e. Carefully reread the Sarah Cunningham quote. How would you describe the challenge this twenty-something woman is offering from the perspective of her disillusioned generation to individual Christ followers and to the Church as a whole?
 - f. *Read Philippians 4:2-9.* Verses 2-3 are a “special appeal” to two women in Philippi who are in conflict. Apparently the situation has been going on for some time, since Paul must have heard about it from Epaphroditus. No doubt he had this in mind when he wrote 2:1-4. When have you seen a dispute between Christians handled in a positive and healing manner?
 - g. In verse 4 Paul says to celebrate in the Lord. Often the word here is translated “rejoice.” We normally understand that word today, I think, as meaning something that happens inside people, a sense of joy welling up and making them happy from within. All that is important, and is contained within Paul’s command; but in his world and culture this “rejoice” would have meant what we would call a public celebration. How can we celebrate as Christians today?
 - h. In a polytheistic culture such as Philippi, why would many of the Philippians feel worried and anxious (see verse 6)?
 - i. How does verse 8 relate to Paul’s discussion of conflict in the church found in verses 2-3?
 - j. Reflect on the promises of verses 7 and 9. How have you experienced the peace of God in the midst of difficult circumstances?
 - k. *Read Philippians 4.10-23.* Roman prisons didn’t provide food for prisoners. That was left for friends and family. Now that Epaphroditus has arrived, Paul has received the gift the Philippians had gathered for him (vv. 10, 18). How does Paul express his gratitude?
 - l. While expressing his thanks, how does Paul also distance himself from a complaining or grumbling attitude?

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- m. How do Paul's words and his attitude speak to a culture of discontent and cynicism?
- n. In what ways do you find what Paul says to be challenging?
- o. Paul often speaks of the energy or power which he found welling up within himself, and which, as he declared, all came from God. He suffered hardships and faced dangers that most people cannot even imagine. Why was he able to do it? Because of *the one who gives me power* (v.13). How have you found verse 13 to be true?
- p. What is "sad" in your life? If you knew, without a doubt, that everything sad was going to "come untrue," how would you respond? How, specifically, would that knowledge change the attitude and focus of your life?
- q. Becky Pippert has suggested the greatest inhibitor to Christ followers sharing the Good News is an underlying skepticism that the Bible may not be true. How would you respond? What would it/did it take to convince you of the absolute truth of Scripture?
- r. What does Paul mean when he says, "...the Lord is near?" How does this reality impact your life, your faith, your joy?
- s. When is the last time you truly rejoiced about anything, allowing joy to overwrite every other emotion and thought? What prompted such joy? How long did it last?
- t. Karl Barth has articulated the essence of contemporary humanism. How do you respond to this quote? Does it frighten you, intrigue you, or describe you?
- u. What would it take for you to develop a single-minded focus on Jesus Christ? How would you begin/continue that process? How does that connect with God's will for you?