

Bible Study: Letters of Paul
Central Presbyterian Church
December 14, 2025
Session 15/16: Philippians “Rooted in Christ”
Reading: Philippians 4: 4-13
English text taken from the Lexham English Bible
Greek text taken from SBLGNT (Society of Biblical Literature Greek New Testament)

Philippians 4:4–13: Joy, Peace, and Contentment in Christ

Macro-Context Letter:

Written from prison (1:13–14), likely Rome (~61–63 CE).

Church:

Philippi—Roman colony, proud of citizenship, steeped in Stoic virtue (self-sufficiency).

Purpose:

Final exhortation for joyful endurance amid conflict (4:2), anxiety, and material need.

Key Theme:

Christ-centered contentment vs. circumstantial happiness.

Verse 4

Greek:

Χαίρετε ἐν κυρίῳ πάντοτε· πάλιν ἔρῳ, χαίρετε.

LEB:

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

Gloss:

| Χαίρετε | ἐν | κυρίῳ | πάντοτε | πάλιν | ἔρῳ | χαίρετε |
| Rejoice | in | Lord | always | again | I-will-say | rejoice |

Grammatical & Lexical Notes:

- Χαίρετε...πάλιν ἔρῳ, χαίρετε – Present imperative + repetition = intensified command. χεῖρω = deep joy, not fleeting emotion.
- ἐν κυρίῳ – Sphere of joy: Christ, not circumstances.
- πάντοτε – Absolute inclusivity.

Historical Context:

- Prison paradox: Paul writes from chains; joy subverts Roman honour-shame.
- Stoic apatheia: Emotionless endurance; Paul offers joyful resilience.

Synthesis:

Joy is a duty rooted in union with the Lord, independent of suffering.

Verse 5

Greek:

τὸ ἐπιεικὲς ὑμῶν γνωσθήτω πᾶσιν ἀνθρώποις. ὁ κύριος ἐγγύς·

LEB:

Let your gentleness be known to all people. The Lord is near.

Gloss:

| τὸ | ἐπιεικὲς | ὑμῶν | γνωσθήτω | πᾶσιν | ἀνθρώποις | ὁ | κύριος | ἐγγύς |
| The | gentleness | of-you | let-be-known | to-all | men | the | Lord | is-near |

Grammatical & Lexical Notes:

- τὸ ἐπιεικὲς – “Yielding fairness” (Aristotle: virtue between strictness and laxity). Not weakness; gracious restraint.
- γνωσθήτω – Aorist passive imperative: decisive public display.
- ὁ κύριος ἐγγύς – Eschatological nearness (parousia) or providential presence?

Historical Context:

- Philippi: Legal disputes common (Euodia/Syntyche, 4:2); gentleness counters litigation culture.
- Imperial slogan: “Caesar is near” (on coins); Paul transfers to Christ.

Synthesis:

Gentleness = visible ethic because Christ’s return/presence demands it.

Verse 6

Greek:

μηδὲν μεριμνᾶτε, ἀλλ’ ἐν παντὶ τῇ προσευχῇ καὶ τῇ δεήσει μετ’ εὐχαριστίας τὰ αἰτήματα ὑμῶν γνωρίζεσθω πρὸς τὸν θεόν·

LEB:

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

| μηδὲν | μεριμνᾶτε | ἀλλ’ | ἐν | παντὶ | τῇ | προσευχῇ | καὶ | τῇ | δεήσει |
μετὰ | εὐχαριστίας | τὰ | αἰτήματα | ὑμῶν | γνωρίζεσθω | πρὸς | τὸν | θεόν |
| Nothing | be-anxious-about | but | in | everything | by-the | prayer | and | by-
the | supplication | with | thanksgiving | the | requests | of-you | let-be-made-
known | to | the | God |

Grammatical & Lexical Notes:

- μηδὲν μεριμνᾶτε – Present imperative negation: stop ongoing anxiety.
- ἀλλ’ ἐν παντί – Strong contrast + inclusive.
- προσευχῇ...δεήσει...εὐχαριστίας – Triad: general, specific, grateful prayer.
- γνωρίζεσθω – Passive: God as recipient.

Historical Context:

- Stoic cure for anxiety: Epictetus: control only internals.
- Jewish piety: Thanksgiving in all circumstances (Ps 34:1).

Synthesis:

Prayer with thanksgiving is the antidote to anxiety—trust in God’s sovereignty.

Verse 7

Greek:

καὶ ἡ εἰρήνη τοῦ θεοῦ ἡ ὑπερέχουσα πάντα νοῦν φρουρήσει τὰς καρδίας ὑμῶν
καὶ τὰ νοήματα ὑμῶν ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ.

LEB:

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

Gloss:

| καὶ | ἡ | εἰρήνη | τοῦ | θεοῦ | ἡ | ὑπερέχουσα | πάντα | νοῦν | φρουρήσει |
τὰς | καρδίας | ὑμῶν | καὶ | τὰ | νοήματα | ὑμῶν | ἐν | Χριστῷ | Ἰησοῦ |
| and | the | peace | of-the | God | the | surpassing | all | mind | will-guard |
the | hearts | of-you | and | the | thoughts | of-you | in | Christ | Jesus |

Grammatical & Lexical Notes:

- ἡ εἰρήνη τοῦ θεοῦ – Genitive of source: God-given shalom.
- ἡ ὑπερέχουσα πάντα νοῦν – Transcendent peace beyond logic.
- φρουρήσει – Future indicative: military term (garrison).

Historical Context:

- Philippi: Roman praetorian guard (1:13); peace as Pax Romana parody.
- Stoic ideal: ataraxia (unperturbed mind); Paul’s is relational.

Synthesis:

Supernatural peace acts as a sentinel over heart/mind—gift of prayer.

Verse 8

Greek:

Τὸ λοιπόν, ἀδελφοί, ὅσα ἐστὶν ἀληθῆ, ὅσα σεμνά, ὅσα δίκαια, ὅσα ἀγνά, ὅσα
προσφιλή, ὅσα εὖφημα, εἴ τις ἀρετὴ καὶ εἴ τις ἔπαινος, ταῦτα λογίζεσθε·

LEB:

Finally, brothers, whatever is true... think about these things.

Gloss:

| Τὸ | λοιπόν | ἀδελφοί | ὅσα | ἐστὶν | ἀληθῆ | ὅσα | σεμνά | ὅσα | δίκαια |
ὅσα | ἀγνά | ὅσα | προσφιλή | ὅσα | εὖφημα | εἴ | τις | ἀρετὴ | καὶ | εἴ | τις |
ἔπαινος | ταῦτα | λογίζεσθε |
| The | finally | brothers | whatever | is | true | whatever | honourable |
whatever | just | whatever | pure | whatever | lovely | whatever |
commendable | if | any | virtue | and | if | any | praise | these-things | think-on
|

Grammatical & Lexical Notes:

- Τὸ λοιπόν – Transitional: “as to the rest” (rhetorical close).

- ὅσα...ταῦτα – Sixfold anaphora; virtue list (Hellenistic style).
- λογίζεσθε – Present imperative: dwell on, not just think.

Historical Context:

- Stoic virtue catalogs: Epictetus; Paul Christianizes (no “self-sufficiency”).
- Roman honour: gravitas, pietas; Paul reorients to Christ-shaped mind.

Synthesis:

Mental discipline: Focus on God-honouring truths to shape character.

Verse 9

Greek:

ἃ καὶ ἐμάθετε καὶ παρελάβετε καὶ ἠκούσατε καὶ εἶδετε ἐν ἐμοί, ταῦτα πράσσετε· καὶ ὁ θεὸς τῆς εἰρήνης ἔσται μεθ’ ὑμῶν.

LEB:

And the things you have learned... practice... and the God of peace will be with you.

Gloss:

| ἃ | καὶ | ἐμάθετε | καὶ | παρελάβετε | καὶ | ἠκούσατε | καὶ | εἶδετε | ἐν | ἐμοί
| ταῦτα | πράσσετε | καὶ | ὁ | θεὸς | τῆς | εἰρήνης | ἔσται | μεθ’ | ὑμῶν |
| What | also | you-learned | and | received | and | heard | and | saw | in | me
| these-things | practice | and | the | God | of-the | peace | will-be | with | you
|

Grammatical & Lexical Notes:

- ἐμάθετε...πράσσετε – Aorist (past) → present imperative (ongoing).
- ἐν ἐμοί – Paul as living example (1 Cor 11:1).
- ὁ θεὸς τῆς εἰρήνης – Echoes v.7.

Historical Context:

- Imitatio: Common in Greco-Roman mentorship (Socrates → Plato).
- Philippi: Paul founded church (Acts 16); personal authority.

Synthesis:

Imitate Paul’s pattern → God’s peace as reward.

Verse 10

Greek:

Ἐχάρην δὲ ἐν κυρίῳ μεγάλως ὅτι ἤδη ποτὲ ἀνεθάλετε τὸ ὑπὲρ ἐμοῦ φρονεῖν, ἐφ’ ᾧ καὶ ἐφρονεῖτε ἡκαιρεῖσθε δέ.

LEB:

I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last you revived your concern for me...

Gloss:

| Ἐχάρην | δὲ | ἐν | κυρίῳ | μεγάλως | ὅτι | ἤδη | ποτὲ | ἀνεθάλετε | τὸ |
| ὑπὲρ | ἐμοῦ | φρονεῖν | ἐφ’ | ᾧ | καὶ | ἐφρονεῖτε | ἡκαιρεῖσθε | δὲ |

| I-rejoiced | but | in | Lord | greatly | that | now | at-last | you-revived | the |
for | me | to-care | in | which | also | you-were-caring | but-you-lacked-
opportunity | but |

Grammatical & Lexical Notes:

- Ἐχάρην...μεγάλως – Aorist: punctiliar joy at gift.
- ἀνεθάλετε – Botanical metaphor: “blossomed again”.
- ἡκαιρεῖσθε – Impersonal: “you had no opportunity”.

Historical Context:

- Gift from Epaphroditus (2:25; 4:18); poverty in Philippi.
- Patronage culture: Gifts = obligation; Paul reframes as partnership.

Synthesis:

Joy in restored partnership, not material gain.

Verse 11

Greek:

οὐχ ὅτι καθ’ ὑστέρησιν λέγω, ἐγὼ γὰρ ἔμαθον ἐν οἷς εἰμι αὐτάρκης εἶναι·

LEB:

Not that I speak according to lack, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am.

Gloss:

| οὐχ | ὅτι | καθ’ | ὑστέρησιν | λέγω | ἐγὼ | γὰρ | ἔμαθον | ἐν | οἷς | εἰμι |
αὐτάρκης | εἶναι |
| not | that | according-to | lack | I-speak | I | for | learned | in | which | I-am |
content | to-be |

Grammatical & Lexical Notes:

- οὐχ ὅτι – Corrective: “not as if I’m in need”.
- αὐτάρκης – Stoic ideal: self-sufficiency (Epictetus).
- ἔμαθον – Aorist: learned through experience.

Historical Context:

- Stoicism: autarkeia = freedom from externals.
- Paul’s twist: Christ-sufficiency, not self.

Synthesis:

Contentment is learned—not innate, not Stoic detachment.

Verse 12

Greek

οἶδα καὶ ταπεινοῦσθαι, οἶδα καὶ περισσεύειν· ἐν παντὶ καὶ ἐν πᾶσιν μεμύημαι,
καὶ χορτάζεσθαι καὶ πεινᾶν, καὶ περισσεύειν καὶ ὑστερεῖσθαι·

LEB:

I know how to be humbled, and I know how to abound... both to be filled and to hunger...

Gloss:

| οἶδα | καὶ | ταπεινοῦσθαι | οἶδα | καὶ | περισσεύειν | ἐν | παντί | καὶ | ἐν |
| πᾶσιν | μεμύημαι | καὶ | χορτάζεσθαι | καὶ | πεινᾶν | καὶ | περισσεύειν | καὶ |
| ὑστερεῖσθαι |
| I-know | also | to-be-humbled | I-know | also | to-abound | in | everything |
| and | in | all-things | I-have-been-initiated | both | to-be-filled | and | to-hunger
| both | to-abound | and | to-lack |

Grammatical & Lexical Notes:

- οἶδα...μεμύημαι – Perfect passive: initiated into mystery.
- ταπεινοῦσθαι / περισσεύειν – Infinitive polarity.

Historical Context:

- Paul's hardships: Shipwrecks, beatings (2 Cor 11:23–27).
- Mystery religions: Initiation language; Paul secularizes.

Synthesis:

Versatility in all conditions—secret of contentment.

Verse 13

Greek:

πάντα ἰσχύω ἐν τῷ ἐνδυναμοῦντί με.

LEB:

I can do all things through the one who strengthens me.

Gloss:

| πάντα | ἰσχύω | ἐν | τῷ | ἐνδυναμοῦντί | με |
| All-things | I-can-do | in | the | one-empowering | me |

Grammatical & Lexical Notes:

- πάντα ἰσχύω – Hyperbolic: “all these things” (contextual).
- ἐν τῷ ἐνδυναμοῦντί με – Present participle: ongoing empowerment. Likely Christ (cf. 4:19).

Historical Context:

- Stoic self-power: “I can endure” (Seneca).
- Paul: Christ-powered.

Synthesis:

Contentment's source: Christ's strength, not self.

Summary Table

Verse	Command	Basis	Historical Echo
4	Rejoice always	In the Lord	Prison joy
5	Be gentle	Lord is near	Anti-litigation
6-7	Pray, not anxious	Peace guards	Anti-Stoic worry
8-9	Think virtuously	God of peace	Christianized virtue
10-13	Be content	Christ strengthens	Anti-autarky

Theological Center:

Joyful, peaceful, content living flows from prayer, right thinking, and Christ's power—countercultural in Roman Philippi.

Application:

- Anxiety → Prayer
- Disunity → Gentleness
- Need → Christ-sufficiency

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How does Paul find joy in hardship?
- What does “contentment in every situation” look like?
- How can we cultivate God's peace?