

## **Serving with the Same Mind in the Lord (Philippians 4:4-9)**

Let's first read the passage Phil 4:4-9 and then open in prayer.

Let me start with a story. Connie has been serving the Lord for the past 3 years in a small church. Throughout the 3 years, God has been gracious to the church and has brought many new believers, a few joined Connie in ministry. In the beginning, Connie thinks it will be nice to have a few companions to serve the Lord together and grow the ministry while praying together and sharing the difficulties in ministry together. However, Connie came to realize that everyone has different opinions and each person has a different level of passion to serve, therefore the level of commitment is different, too. Everyone brought in their individual personality to the ministry. Things got worse when those in ministry split into two groups of different opinions. Connie thought to herself, the issue is only on how the church renovation should be, and not on biblical issues. Why can't everyone be united in the Lord? What was missing? How can we be of the same mind in serving the Lord?

This question is a familiar one for those who have been serving the Lord in church for a while. Unity in church is a regular issue, especially in a growing church. Disputes arise on how to grow a church, how to do this or that ministry, how to govern the church etc. As one who serves in church, sometimes we feel very discouraged, very disappointed with certain brother or sister, or even the church staff as well. So how did Paul, who is familiar with planting churches and helping growing churches, teach about this? If we look at Philippians 2, Paul teaches a lot about becoming like-minded, having the same mindset as Christ Jesus, and in Chapter 4, he told us about 2 sisters who are fellow laborers with Paul and yet are not in agreement with each other or with the church. He asks the other members of the Philippian church to help and he follows with an exhortation on it.

First, rejoice in the Lord always and Paul says it again: rejoice! Rejoicing always is impossible without being in the Lord. However, why do we need to rejoice in the Lord always? Paul knows why he needs to rejoice in the Lord. In fact, in the book of Philippians itself, Paul uses the word “joy” 16 times. What about us? Why do Christians need to rejoice in the Lord always when there are many hardships, sadness and worries in this world. Can we rejoice in such times and so to obey the command to rejoice in the Lord always? James 1: 2-4 says “Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.” We especially need to be joyful at times of trial because we know it will lead to our spiritual maturity and completeness. The prophet Habakkuk gave us his reasons in Chapter 3:17-18, “Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails, and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen, and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior.” What are the things that make you joyful? Prophet Habakkuk rejoices in the Lord because God saves us, and this alone is enough to be joyful always despite his dire circumstances. We may not have money, house or job but we can still rejoice because our God is our Savior. This is an everlasting reason for joy, and nothing in this world can bring long lasting joy to us, because everything in this world is temporal, only God and salvation is eternal.

After having joy, we need to “let your gentleness be evident to all.” Have you felt agitated and defensive when you are not happy? Just grumpy and frustrated and easily snap back at others when approached? I think we all have been guilty of this at some point in our lives. With joy, we can be gentle to others. We don't get defensive and we seem to be more accommodating to others, accepting, nice and kind. We realize God is with us. He is near and we

can bring his presence to others. People know when we are in difficult times, but if we rejoice during this time, how big is this testimonial to others? People can see in you that God is with you. He is close to you.

To be like-minded in the Lord, we have to be aware of our thoughts. If we are anxious about anything, then we will not have the peace of God guarding our hearts and minds. The original word anxious means to be pulled in different directions. Therefore, it is hard for us to glorify God nor serve Him. Verse 6 continues saying that “in every situation, by prayer and petitions with thanksgiving, present our requests to God.” I am a person that worries and panic easily. I used to work in a travel company, booking hotels for tour groups. It was a very demanding and stressful job. One Monday, while I was in the subway traveling to work, around halfway there, I suddenly got a panic attack. I was too stressed as I got closer to work. I could hardly breathe and I was gasping for air. I remembered this scripture and kept praying to God. I prayed and prayed the scripture over and over, desperately asking God to fulfill his promise to give me peace as I present my requests to God. I prayed stubbornly and would not give up until God granted me peace. It was about 10 minutes before God gave me peace and stopped my panic attack. I went to work that day as if nothing happened, but my heart was filled with thanksgiving to God for he is faithful and merciful to me. The keypoint here is “thanksgiving”. As Christians we know to pray and ask God for help, however, we tend to forget to pray with a thankful heart to God, especially when we are in dire need or situation. Persistence is another problem. Psalm 100:4 says “Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise: give thanks to him and praise his name.” Without thanksgiving, we cannot enter the gates to go to God. First Thessalonians 5:18 says, “give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” This is a command and it is God’s will for us. Psalm 95:1-3 tells us to “sing for joy

to the Lord; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song. For the Lord is the great God, the great King above all gods.” and later in verse 7 “for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care.” Psalm 95: 1-7 gives us many reasons to praise God and to be thankful to God. Romans 1:21 shows us what happened to those who did not glorify God nor give thanks to Him, “ For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.” We better be careful of our attitude towards God and to His ministry.

Now that we are rejoicing in the Lord and not anxious but in everything present our requests to God in thanksgiving, then “ the peace of God which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” The question is do we need our hearts and minds to be guarded? Our hearts’ desires and feelings, and the thoughts in our minds, don't they constitute who I am, my personality and my individuality? What does the bible say about our hearts and minds? Are they described positively or negatively? Psalm 4:23 says “ Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.” Jeremiah 17:9 says, “the heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?” and Romans 12:2 says, “ do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” In other words, our hearts and minds, if we do not control or renew, are against God, against the truth and are easily used by Satan to tempt, deceive and wage spiritual war against us, to make us sin. Knowing what the bible teaches us, we have a choice. Do we choose to believe the bible above our own thoughts? If we don't, we will not live a fruitful spiritual life, and will not encounter God. Our lives won't change. Worse, Matthew 7:19 tells us, “every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.” Without a fruitful spiritual life, we can end

up in hell. So, what does it mean by having our hearts and minds guarded in Christ Jesus?

Hebrews 8:10 says “This is the covenant I will establish with the people of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them in their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.” Our hearts and minds need to be guarded in Christ Jesus through God’s Word. This implies that we need to submit our hearts and minds to God and let God be the God in our hearts and minds, and not be god ourselves.

Now that we have surrendered our old self to God, we need to put on some good stuff. Verse 8 says, “Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, if anything is excellent or praiseworthy, think about such things.” True and noble, some bible translations use truth and honest, have to do with our being: are there truth in our words and engagements with others and show decency in behavior? Whatever is right and pure, some bible translations use just or upright and holy, these have to do with our actions: are we dealing with others justly and righteously without impurity or a mixture of sins? Whatever is lovely and admirable, some bible translations use beautiful and good reports or commendable or worthy of respect. These words describe things we do that make us well spoken of or well thought of by others, things that make us lovable. Finally, if anything is excellent, some bible translated to good virtue, or praiseworthy, think about such things, some bible translated into meditate about such things. All these adjectives describe our bearing or testimonial as a Christian. Things we should fill our thoughts all the time and things we renew our mind with. I know what you may be thinking. Is it even possible to do this 100% all the time? This is not me at all! Romans 14:7-9 says, “for none of us lives for ourselves alone, and none of us dies for ourselves alone. If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. For this

reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living.” Our personality does not need to be characterized by sin or bad stuff in us. We can be a new self that is full of Christ without impurity. Our identity should be in God and not in how we think, behave or say that are based on our corrupted flesh. God never asked us to do things with our own strength, if we could, Jesus would not need to come and redeem us and the Holy Spirit does not need to abide in us to help us. Jesus says in John 15:5, “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.” As long as we abide in Jesus, through God’s Word, we can do anything good. We can change ourselves for the better. A sister in Christ of mine used to say, “change yourself, change the world.” When we change, the world around us changes, and this includes our spouse, family members, brothers and sisters in church, friends and coworkers. And it all starts with ourselves.

Finally, we have to put into practice all the truth we have learned, received, heard or seen in the spiritual leaders God has placed in our lives, and of course those we received from our encounter with God through the bible and prayers. The greek word for practice, is *prasso*, which means what is done as a regular practice, a routine or habit. This word connotes repetition as part of practice. In order to learn a new trick, we know we need to keep doing it until it’s perfected. Same with God’s truth. We need to continuously apply it in our lives in order to master it and become part of us. So, when we continuously, repeatedly practice the truth, then the God of peace will be with us. Psalm 145:18 says, “The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth.”

Promises of God are usually conditional. We need to fulfill our part before God fulfills his promises to us. Verses 4-6 are things we need to take off, and verse 8-9, are things we need to put on. This idea of taking off our old self, and putting on a new self is not a new biblical

concept, but rather a spiritual truth that we need to constantly do. Ephesians 4:22-24 says, “to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.” We need to take off our old self, which is our old way of thinking and behavior. Before, we did not know God and so we did not know how to live joyfully amidst difficult times. But now we have been called out of darkness into the light to inherit eternal salvation, we can rejoice at this alone if nothing else. Before, we worried and anxious about many things, but now we know we have a God who cares for us and so we can put into his hands all our troubles and be filled by the peace of God in our hearts and minds. This is worthy to praise and to be thankful to God.

Having let go of our old self and putting on the new self in the truth, brothers and sisters in church will now be able to serve in unity, with the same mind with each other, because we have all tuned up ourselves to the truth of God. We all have the same goal and pursue in Christ Jesus. No longer we bring in our habits, our personality or our thoughts and way into God’s ministry but rather everyone who serves the Lord, serves with the truth, with the bible as our only guidance that is above all transient, fleshly and worldly ways.

So let’s ask ourselves again how can we serve God with the same mind in Christ Jesus? If we constantly rejoice because God is our savior, and when we are anxious while serving the Lord with others, whether we face issues in ministry or a conflict with another person, we can pray and present our requests to God in a thankful heart, full of praise to God, and if we constantly think of our attitude, behavior and conduct to others seasoned with truth, honesty, just, pure, lovely and of good conduct, worthy of respect, and finally, if we constantly make sure our speech, behavior and actions are rooted in the truth, and so our hearts and minds are guarded by

the peace of God in Christ Jesus and God is with us all the time, then, don't you think we can now serve in unity under the guidance of the Holy Spirit? We once again see here that if we have God amidst of us, then we have nothing to worry about. All we need to do is to draw close to God and submit to Him. Again, we change, the world changes!