

Philippians 4:1-9: Persevering In The Faith As We Wait For The Lord's Return

Perseverance is an important quality in many areas of life. We can think of the need to persevere in being faithful in marriage, persevere in some course of study and persevere in learning a new skill such as a musical instrument. In any sport, perseverance is essential. In the middle of a game of football, cricket, netball or basketball, a player can't just walk off and go for a swim when he or she feels like it!

When it comes to living as a Christian, perseverance is also an important attribute. We see it in our Epistle reading today from Philippians Chapter 4. In this Chapter and also in Chapter 3, the Apostle Paul refers to the fact of the return of the Lord Jesus: *we eagerly await a Saviour from there (Heaven), the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.* (Philippians 3:20-21) Then in Chapter 4:5 he writes *the Lord is near.* He means that the coming of the Lord is near, or certain.

In Chapter 3 Paul humbly admits that he has not yet been made perfect but that he needs to *press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.* (Philippians 3:14) He is determined to persevere as a Christian.

Then in Chapter 4 he writes *that is how you should stand firm in the Lord dear friends!* He wants those whom he loves as fellow Christians to persevere in the faith and to be ready when the Lord Jesus returns or when they go to meet Him. How will this perseverance be seen?

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1. Perseverance In Our Relationships With Other Christians: 4:2-3

Working together with other Christians isn't always easy. We have different personalities, different temperaments & different backgrounds and experiences. Sometimes we disagree about how things should be done or even what should be done in the Church's ministry.

Sometimes relationships might be strained or even unpleasant. Paul exhorts two women in the Philippian Church, Euodia and Syntyche, *to agree with each other in the Lord*. They were both keen Christians and both engaged in ministry alongside the Apostle Paul. He described them as *fellow workers*. And yet they had fallen out with one another over something and were not forgiving each other and getting over it! Paul even asks another (un-named) Church member to help them sort out their differences.

For the last 2,000 years Christians have read about these two particular Christians and their state of disagreement. How embarrassing! Imagine if your name was there for the rest of the world to read about! They needed to be reconciled, particularly in the light of Jesus' return. Of course such obvious unpleasantness was not a good witness to the Church or to the non-Christian community in which they lived, who looked for failure and hypocrisy in the lives of Christians.

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2. Perseverance In Joy, The Antidote To Anxiety: 4-7

Sometimes we are anxious about different things. Paul himself had experienced such anxiety as we see in Philippians 2:28 when he writes about *having less anxiety*.

The medicine for anxiety is a greater trust in the Lord as we pray and experience God's peace and are filled with joy. We are to *rejoice in the Lord always* even when we feel 'down in the dumps'. Jesus is coming back and in the light of that fact, we should persevere in expressing our joy that our sins are forgiven and that we are *citizens of heaven* as Paul describes Christians in Chapter 3:20.

3. Perseverance In Living A Life Which Is Pleasing To God: 8-9

As we wait for Jesus to return, what sort of lives should we be living? What should occupy our thinking and speaking? Paul tells the Philippians (and us) what we should be persevering in: *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*.

When high-jumpers compete in the Olympics or even at 'lesser' athletic events, as they clear the bar, the bar is raised for the next jump. Perseverance in their training will help them do their best. The help of a coach will help them improve.

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The list of qualities which Paul outlines here is a high bar! As we persevere in the Christian life, waiting for the Lord Jesus to return, with the help that God gives by His Spirit, we will be helped to stick to the truth of God's Word, overcome some temptations, avoid unpleasant conflicts with our Christian brothers and sisters and avoid watching TV shows, reading books and accessing internet sites which may undermine or compromise our faith in the Lord.

Perseverance is an essential quality for a Christian. Many of the other New Testament writers exhort their readers to persevere in following Jesus to the end of their lives. For example:

The writer of Hebrews says: *Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.*

And James writes: *Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.*

And Matthew quoting the Lord Jesus writes: *he who perseveres to the end will be saved. (24:13)*

It is clear then from Scripture that perseverance is part of the Christian's DNA. It is a fruit of being a genuine Christian. True Christians will persevere to the end of their lives or until the Lord Jesus returns, whichever comes first.

May God help us to persevere as Christians as we support and encourage one another in the faith; through prayer, the study of the Bible and expressions of sacrificial love towards one another.