

Text: Philippians 4:8-9

Title: No Godly Living? No Peace.

Truth: God is near those with godly patterns of thinking and behaving.

Date/Location: Sunday May 8, 2022 at FBC

Introduction

Philippians 4:8-9 ⁸Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy-- meditate on these things. ⁹The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.

I made kind of a big deal in the previous verses about how we must take the entire passage as a unified exhortation instead of splitting it into separate pieces and expecting one part of it to “work” against the problem we are keen to fix, which is our internal anxiety. But our anxiety is *caused* by things: and not just by a mere lack of prayer. Certainly, a weak prayer life is part of it, but other areas of sin in our lives can weigh heavily upon us, even if we do not at first recognize it.

The entire package comes together: rejoicing, being gracious, knowing the Lord is soon returning, not being anxious, praying, giving thanks, requesting God for help, thinking right things, and behaving properly. *These together will lead to the peace of God, which is that inner calmness of soul produced by God.* Note that this peace can be yours whether God affirmatively answers your specific petitions or not.

Another interesting detail that ties everything together is this: Verse 9 literally says, “and the God of **the** peace will be with you.” The extra word that you do not see in most translations is “the” before the word *peace*. This refers to the peace of verse 7—that very peace is the one Paul is still talking about, the peace that passes understanding after praying about your anxious thoughts and giving thanks to God. “The” peace means that the God—the one who brings the peace of God—will be with you. Not just the

abstract concept or feeling of peace will be present in your life, but the *God of the peace of God* will be with you. Therefore, the peace of the *God of the peace of God* guards you because God is actually there dwelling with you and in you. God is near to those who have a broken heart and saves those who have a contrite spirit (Psalm 34:18). God dwells in a high and holy place, *and* with the one who has a contrite and humble spirit” (Isaiah 57:15). When you draw near to God, He will draw near to you (James 4:8) because you are then of a suitable character to be near to God.

You ask, how does that happen? Here is how:

I. Biblical Thinking, v. 8

The battle between the flesh and the Spirit rages on in the life of every believer, whether you recognize it or not. Where it rages is in the mind—in the inner person, in the soul. It has to do with sinful thoughts, vulgar words, lustful fantasies, inordinate¹ desires, and the like. And sometimes, those thoughts squirt out in our speech or behavior!

As a corrective, the apostle instructs us to spend our mental time on the following kinds of things:²

A. True. Not false. Valid, reliable, honest. True things correspond to how things are, not necessarily how someone presents them to be. More importantly, truth corresponds to how God sees things, not how man sees them. What the Bible presents as true is true, and it guides you how to be discerning about other things.

What the Bible presents as false is also false—so when it records the wrong words of Job’s friends, or of Satan, it accurately portrays those words, and by them conveys information that is *not* true. “You will not surely die!” (Gen. 3:4) is a false statement, correctly conveyed to us in Scripture, in such a way that the true truth is emphasized. That is, if Adam and Eve eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they *will* die (Gen. 2:17). This in turn reminds us that the wages of sin for all of us is death. I digress...

¹ Excessive; disproportionate compared to a standard; unrestrained; disorderly.

² Some of the definitions below are taken from Homer Kent, *Philippians*, p. 152.

Truth characterizes God. It should characterize us too.

B. Noble. Honorable, dignified, worthy of respect, above reproach.

God is noble. We should be too.

C. Just. Conforming to God's standard of right. Today we have social justice and environmental justice and economic justice. What about *divine justice*—does it get at least a place at the table? In fact, it rules the entire table.

God is just. We should be too.

D. Pure. Moral purity, chastity. See 1 Timothy 5:22, Titus 2:5, James 3:17, 1 John 3:3.

God has no impurity in Him. We should be similar in our thinking and life.

You have so many mental “cycles” in a minute or hour or day, and you can choose how to spend them. This idea comes from the design of digital computers, which operate in accordance with a clock signal. That clock times their work and the processor only has so many cycles per second. In each cycle, scheduling software directs it how to spend its computational time. It can do some of this thing, and some of another thing, but it only has so many cycles in a second to do that work, and no more. Similarly, you too have a choice about what you spend time thinking about. You have only so many hours in a day, and so many days in your life, and you have a significant measure of freedom to choose how you are going to spend that time engaging your mind—or trying not to! You can engage it with one thing or another. You must make a conscious choice about that—what to work on, what to think on in free time, what to watch, what to read: because all that stuff is “thinking.”

E. Lovely. That which is agreeable, pleasing, delightful, *and* all the above and below as well. It is not sinfully pleasing, but holy in pleasure.

F. Good report. Praiseworthy, commendable.

- G. Anything of virtue. Virtuous, excellence in character. The “anything” shows there is latitude in this instruction, and you must discern if the things of your thought life are virtuous. There are many such things, but there are also many things that do not qualify.
- H. Anything praiseworthy. Anything worthy of admiration or recognized or approved for its true good.
- I. Think on these things. To “meditate” on these things means to give careful thought, to reckon, to consider, ponder, or dwell on. That is easy enough to say, but how do we implement such a thinking pattern?
1. To do so takes energetic mental effort. Sometimes we like to put our minds into neutral, say by watching something on the television or computer. But then our mind is engaged in thinking about what we are seeing. That is a form of meditation. If your mind is truly in neutral, then other things may well fill it. Other times we are consumed with thinking about problem X or situation Y or worry Z, or worshipping God, or praying, or balancing our checkbook or *reading our Bible*, or working on some home project, or whatever. These things fill our mind and do not allow room for other things at that time. This is why I strongly advocate that you keep busy with productive things to engage your mind with those activities. If you are often idle, your flesh will find things to fill your mind. Idle *minds* are the Devil’s workshop.
 2. Long-established patterns of bad thought are hard to fix. Make a faith-filled, concerted effort to establish new heavenly patterns of thought. Set your mind on heavenly things (Colossians 3:2). Check yourself with this question: “Should I be thinking like this? Should I be thinking about this?” If a quick comparison to true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, praiseworthy, etc. fails, then switch mental gears and direct your brain to think about other stuff. Is the brain-clutch grinding and not wanting to shift gears, or it keeps popping back into the previous gear? Keep working at it!

II. Biblical Behaving, v. 9a

- A. Things Learned and Received. These two ideas go together. Paul taught the Philippians and they learned what he taught, and then they accepted (received) it. Paul was carrying out the Great Commission by teaching the new believers to know *and obey* what Jesus had taught to His disciples.
- B. Things Heard and Seen. These two also go together. Not only did Paul teach in a “classroom” fashion, but he lived out the Christian faith. They were able to hear his words and see his life with their own eyes and ears. For an example of this, see 2 Thess. 3:7.
- C. God tells the Philippian Christians to “put into practice” the body of knowledge gained by the instruction and example of sound teachers. This is a present tense plural command. That means it is incumbent upon the church, the whole church, and it is to be an ongoing practice.
- D. We have observed the details of the text and understood the meaning of them. Application is straightforward. Paul is writing to a Christian church, and we are one of those. Furthermore, we know the principle that the New Testament letters are meant to be general documents for the life of the church not just in the first century but until the Lord returns—even more directly than the Old Testament is applicable to us. So, Paul might as well be speaking directly to us. We must put these things into practice.

III. Biblical Peace, v. 9b

- A. The promise of the Word of God is that if these things are in you and abound, you *will* experience the presence of God. God—the God of peace—will be with you. Think on that good and lovely thought. What a blessing! This is parallel to the promise that ended the preceding paragraph at the end of verse 7: the peace of God will guard your hearts and minds through Christ.
- B. That does not mean that the circumstances all around you will be calm and nice and easy and smooth sailing. But God will be with you like Jesus was asleep on the boat on Galilee with His disciples.

C. And when God is with you and His peace guards you, a certain calm assurance—not bold arrogance—accompanies you as you live life amid a very unpeaceful world.

Conclusion

Remember what we learned last week? We were thinking about how to experience peace in our inner person despite whatever circumstances may befall us. It is not easy.

But we said that the whole package of verses 4-9 is critical. We cannot simply use the one weapon of prayer and expect have our anxieties melt away while we ignore other Biblical instruction about sanctification, our conduct toward others, and our thought life. We must rejoice in the Lord, be gracious people, stop being anxious, pray, give thanks, think on good and godly things, and conduct ourselves in a way that agrees with what the Bible has presented to us. Our prayer will be effective under such conditions. This is the way that the peace of God will guard us, and the God of peace will be with us.

Peace comes not through a mystical means that happens apart from holiness. “There is no peace for the wicked” (Isaiah 48:22). False prophets “seduced My people, saying, ‘Peace!’ when there is no peace” (Ezek. 13:10).

Read Psalm 27:1-3 and Psalm 91:1-16. Because we make God our refuge, our delight, our life, we can walk confidently in Him.

Resource

Harold Vaughan, *Lord, Help Me Not to Have These Evil Thoughts*, Christ Life, 2006.

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