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## Philippians 4:8-9 “How to Have Peace”

Intro. I have entitled my message, “How to Have Peace.” That is based on the last words of v.9, “and the God of peace will be with you.” If the God of peace is with us, then surely we shall enjoy His peace. But if we are going to enjoy His peace, we must also follow what Paul says in vv.8-9. As we shall see, right thinking and right living are necessary conditions for experiencing the peace of God. On the other hand, whenever we disobey God, we lose that peace and we know we have done something wrong.

So I want to share with you two main requirements for having God’s peace. First of all, we can enjoy God’s peace:

### I. BY RIGHT THINKING

Paul says in the last of v.8, “meditate on these things.” Thus he implies that we can and should exercise a very rigid control over our thought lives. We are responsible for our thoughts. We need to put a guard at the gate of our minds. The word translated “meditate” (*logizomai*) is a word which refers to careful reflection. It is actually the word that was used for accounting. We need to realize how important our thought life really is.

A. The Particular Examples to Embrace – In v.8 Paul gives a list of examples of things we should think or meditate upon. We should meditate upon things that are:

1. True - Let your minds be lifted and filled by bringing them into contact with truth. That excludes lots of things! Primarily this has reference to the truths of God’s Word (cf. Col. 1:5). Jesus said to His Father, “Your Word is Truth” (John 17:17). In that same verse he said that we are sanctified through truth. Also, Jesus is the Truth (John 14:6). We should think and meditate upon Him.

On the other hand, Satan is the liar (John 8:44), and he wants to corrupt our minds with his lies. In 2 Cor. 11:3 Paul said, “But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.” He will try to get us to doubt God’s Word. When that happens, we will lose God’s peace.

2. Noble - This (*semnos*) actually refers to things that are worthy of reverence, dignified, serious, or solemn. The word is used as one of the qualifications of a deacon, translated “grave.” While many fill their minds with frivolities and silliness, Paul advises us to focus more on the serious and weighty aspects of life. Yet too often we focus on things that really don’t matter.

3. Just - The word (*dikaios*) also means “righteous.” It means doing those things that are right. In all his planning, let the Christian ask himself, “Is this in harmony with God’s will and law?” Also, we should meditate upon God’s righteous acts.

4. Pure - “Pure” (*hagnos*) probably refers to moral purity. Literally, it refers to that which is holy. Let there be in you a shuddering recoil from all that is filthy. Instead, we should fill our minds with what is pure and holy. How many novels or TV programs or movies fall short of this standard!

5. Lovely - This (*prospiles*) refers to things or people that are winsome, pleasing, amiable.

6. Good Report - These would be things that people speak well of, things that are well-sounding (*euphemos*), appealing. Even upon non-Christians they should make a good impression. So it refers to those things that in their inner essence they are actually worthy of creating such an impression upon others.

Thus, whatever is of bad report, or bad news, should not be the focus of our thoughts. If you want to lose peace and get agitated, just listen to one of the 24-hour cable news channels! Some of us need to rethink that practice!

With the last two phrases, Paul summarizes all that is worthy of our thoughts. Nothing that is really worthwhile for believers to ponder and take into consideration is omitted from this summarizing phrase.

7. Virtue - This (*arête*) refers to moral excellence or moral goodness. This may simply sum up the first 4 that he mentioned. It is sad to see our society turn from virtue as a standard to pursue.

8. Praise - This may sum up the 5th and 6th mentioned. Anything at all that is a matter of moral and spiritual excellence, so that it is the proper object of praise, is the right pasture for the Christian mind to graze in.

Application: How stimulating, purifying, and uplifting these things are. We should cultivate the mind to dwell on these things. You would do well to spend time with *people* who may be described by v.8, people who speak the truth, who are noble, just, pure, lovely, of good report, and virtuous. That that sin with what he goes on to say in v.9. Furthermore, before you read something, including social media, or watch something on TV or elsewhere, or listen to music, or engage in conversation with certain people, you should put it to the test of Philippians 4:8. If it is not described in v.8, you should avoid it. Use Philippians 4:8 as a filter for our minds. In fact, some people have Internet filtering software to help believers accomplish this very thing. And this leads to another point I wish to make, not only the examples to embrace, but also:

B. The Opposites to Avoid - Now, you will not obey this commandment unless you obey also the negative side of it. You will not think on these fair things, and bring them into your hearts, unless you turn away, by resolute effort, from their opposites. So avoid the lies and falsehoods of Satan and the world. Avoid what is silly and frivolous. Avoid what is unjust and unrighteous. Avoid what is impure. Like flies that are attracted to a piece of putrid meat, too many are drawn to lustful and impure thoughts. There is no way you can obey v.8 and at the same time watch filthy movies on video or at the movies, or listen to many forms of contemporary secular music. Even much of what is on TV is not fit for the Christian mind, like sitcoms, reality TV, and so forth. Others, though never stooping to such things as pornography, will think nothing of entertaining themselves with the latest gossip and trivial fiction. We should also avoid other types of thought that are opposites of what we read in v.8, such as negative thinking, worry and fear. I appeal to you, turn from such thoughts, and focus your mind on the type things Paul mentions here.

There is an old saying that “you can’t prevent the birds from flying over your head, but you can keep them from making a nest in your hair.” So it is with evil thoughts. We can’t avoid them altogether, but we sure can keep from dwelling on them. If we follow the positive line of thinking that Paul mentions here, we will greatly reduce the coming of unworthy

thoughts; but even when all is said and done you will find a stray evil thought slipping in occasionally. It is not the coming of an evil thought that is wrong; the wrong is in harboring such thought. 2 Corinthians 10:5 tells us to bring into captivity “every thought to the obedience of Christ.” Thus when evil thoughts seek to enter the mind, ask God’s policeman to arrest them instantly by calling upon the name of the Lord. Push them out by positive thinking — “think on these things!”

Never has a generation of people had been such difficulty in obeying v.8 than the young generation of today. They have at their fingertips a device called a smart phone. They have easy and constant access to watch videos, read social media, text messages and so forth that are just the opposite of v.8. If you knew what so-called Christian young people are viewing and reading today, it would turn your stomach. Their minds are being highly influenced by the world. I’m concerned that 8-year-old daughter has one. In the old days before modern media, children and young people would sit in a room and listen to their elders. Today, they are either out with her friends or they are shut up in their room playing video games or viewing worldly media. This is a serious problem.

C. How His Counsel is to Be Obeyed - There must be real, honest, continuous effort to keep out the opposite, as well as to bring in the “things that are lovely and of good report.”

All of the positive qualities are embodied in a Person, Jesus Christ. He is the sum of all virtue and of all praise. So don’t merely meditate up abstractions, but upon a Person, Jesus Christ.

Furthermore, all of the virtues of v.8 are found in the Bible. Read Psa. 19:7-9 and notice the parallel, “The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul; The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes; The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; The judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.” Spend much time each week reading the Word of God. The Christian who fills his heart and mind with God’s Word will have a “built-in radar” for detecting wrong thoughts.

Finally, this command will be obeyed if we obey Col. 3:2, “Set your mind on things above, not on things on earth.” Focus your mind on the things of God, and not the things of this world.

Why is it important to focus your mind on the things described in v.8? Will consider next:

#### D. The Reasons for this Counsel

1. Thought Molds Action - Proverbs says, “As a man thinks in his heart so is he.” Jesus said, “... From within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornication, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man” (Mark 7:21). The thought life is the strategic point in all being. In some ways we are like a computer. If you put garbage into a computer, that is what you will get out. On the other hand, if you put into your mind the things mentioned in v.8, your lives will likewise do what is true, just, lovely, and so forth. Notice how Paul links learning and doing in v.9, “The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do.” Though sometimes our actions are inconsistent with what we have learned, you cannot have right actions without first putting in right thoughts.

2. Thoughts and Actions Produce Character – Character is who you are when no one is looking. Character is who you are when you're away on vacation! Our characters are not molded and changed until we are not only learners of the Word, but also doers of the Word. Once we have consistently put into practice what we have learned, then it becomes a part of our character. For example, being kind to others will not become an aspect of our character until we have practiced kindness to others consistently.

Furthermore, someone has well said that:

3. Character Determines or Reveals Destiny - If your life has been spent lusting for money, or booze, or for others such things, what kind of eternal destiny do you think you will have? You may sow your wild oats, but what will the harvest be? You are not fit for heaven but for hell. But if you have spent your life living for Jesus, and helping others, surely your destiny will be far different. Not only will you spend eternity in heaven, but your beautiful character qualities will be rewarded.

Secondly, we can enjoy God's peace:

## II. BY CONSISTENT, RIGHT ACTIONS

Paul said in v.9, "The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do...." Paul was not satisfied just to get people converted. He was anxious to see them grow spiritually and advance in the things of the Lord, and he knew that this could be accomplished only through a teaching ministry, feeding the saints on the meat, bread, milk, and water of the Word. Only thus could they grow and become strong in the Lord. But he also wanted them to put what they learn into practice. "These do" he says. Now let's look at that verse closely and see:

A. The Foundation for Consistent Actions – As we have already discussed, right thoughts lead to right actions. Paul uses several different words to describe how we learn the Christian way and think the right thoughts. I want to present v.9 in logical order:

1. By Hearing – In Paul's day most people learned first by hearing. They did not have as much access to books as we have today. We need to hear God's Word at church, but we also can read God Word. Then, we are changed:

2. By Learning (*manthano*) – This means gaining an understanding of what is taught, and remembering it.

3. By Receiving - The word "received" in the Greek (*paralambano*) was used regularly of receiving truth from a teacher. But there may a difference between "learning" and "receiving." "Receiving" may have more to do with receiving truth inwardly, and making it a part of our inner man (I Thess. 2:13). The believers in Philippi had not only been informed—they had gone a step further: They had also "received." In other words, they listened to Paul's teaching, they believed what he said, and they appropriated his teaching. Facts in the head are not enough; we must also have truths in the heart.

4. By Seeing Examples - The apostle had also exemplified these virtues in his own daily conduct, so that his listeners could see the truth in his life. He lived what he preached. He taught by word of mouth, and demonstrated Christian principles as he lived before his converts. We who have been Christians for any reasonable length of time can remember those who have lived before us a life that was pure joy and light to us. We are better, stronger Christians for having known and watched such saints of God. The life they

lived and the joy they displayed in their daily living brought strength to us because we know their source of light and strength was in the Lord. Pastors, deacons, teachers, and parents especially have a responsibility to set good examples that others can see and model themselves after. If others have been a source of sunshine and joy to us, we have the same opportunity to be a joy and light to others with whom we come in contact.

In some way, seeing examples of how a Christian is to live and serve the Lord will make more impact upon us than what we read, especially if it is just teaching. What we see or visualize makes more impact than what we hear. So this point that Paul makes here is very important.

But thinking and learning the Christian way is not enough. Paul has in mind thinking with a purpose, and that purpose lies in the sphere of action. So notice with me last of all:

B. The Appeal for *Consistent* Actions - True believers hear. They meditate until they understand. Then they act upon it, putting it into constant practice. James 1:22 says, “Be doers of the Word, and not hearers only.” “Do” in v.9 is *prasso* - practice. It is also a present tense, which describes habitual, ongoing action. We are not only to think right; we are to *do* right consistently. We must apply what we know. In John 13:17 we read, “If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.” We must not only hear and learn; we must also practice. Again, this is how our character is changed and molded.

Conclusion: Paul says that if you focus on the right thoughts, and if you put into action the Christian principles that you learn, “the God of peace will be with you.” Do you have the peace of God? Do you sometimes lose God’s peace when you are afflicted with guilt or anxiety? If so, perhaps it is because you have not been focusing on the right thoughts. Perhaps you have not been putting into practice the things we have been teaching you. I call upon you to take specific steps to put vv.8-9 into practice in the coming days by trusting in the Lord to help you. If you do, “the God of peace will be with you.”

Now it is time to respond to God’s Word. Are there somethings you need to filter out, to keep from thinking on such things. If so, make a commitment to stop thinking on these things. Make a commitment to think on the kind of things mentioned in v.8. In what you learn that is true, but such things into practice in your life.

Sources: Oliver B. Greene, *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Philippians* (Greenville, SC: The Gospel Hour, Inc., 1965); William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1962); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, Vol. 14 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977 reprint); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [CD-ROM] (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Joyful* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1974); Kenneth S. Wuest’s *Word Studies From the Greek New Testament*, Vol. 2, *Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1942). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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