

Putting God First in Thoughts and Actions

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I invite you to turn in the word of God this morning to Philippians 4, the fourth chapter of Paul's letter to the Philippians. God willing, we'll soon return to Hebrews, pick up our study there. But as I was wondering what to preach to you this morning, the text that I had a reference in my sermon to the young people on Wednesday night came to my mind. I thought maybe it would be good for us to think upon it. Now, I'm not going to tie it in too much into what I said to the young people, that would be too irrelevant to most of you here. But verses 8 and 9, as I dealt with, "Thy kingdom come," were helpful in understanding how that what does it mean for thy kingdom to come in my life, in my heart, and you have it some way reflected here in Philippians 4, verses 8 and 9. I'm going to read from verse 1, read through the end of verse 9 so follow along as we read God's word from Philippians 4, verse 1.

1 Therefore, my brethren dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved. 2 I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord. 3 And I intreat thee also, true yokefellow, help those women which laboured with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and with other my fellowlabourers, whose names are in the book of life. 4 Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice. 5 Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand. 6 Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. 7 And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. 8 Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. 9 Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you.

We end our reading there at the ninth verse. This which you have heard, beloved, is the living, eternal word of God. Receive it as such. And the people of God said, Amen.

Let's pray.

Lord, it's so easy for us to be in this context and say, "Have thine own way." We all know what it's like to struggle, to surrender, to feel the kicking of our own wills against the will of God when the plain truths of thy word, the commandments that are unambiguous come to us and there's friction. God, we pray that there may be such a work in all of our lives that we truly desire across the board in every respect that thou wilt have thine own way. In this little time around the word, give what none of us can supply, your Holy Spirit. Make every thought captive. Bring all our beings to sit at thy feet like Mary and hear thy word. Address every need, comfort, console, convict. Make us more like Jesus, for we pray in his name. Amen.

Every year at our youth camp, there inevitably is a heavy emphasis upon the word of God. All the sermons, at least the vast majority of them, will place upon the minds and the consciences of our young people how vital it is that they read the word of God, stay in the word of God, and know the word of God, and live the word of God. And this year was no different. Even as I conducted the morning devotions with the staff, and looked at little windows of the risen Lord Jesus in the presence of his people before his ascension, again, there is this application of the importance of the word of God. And it's so important because without it, we are lost at sea. It helps us where it really matters. If I can put it this way, how you think determines what you love and what you love determines how you live, especially how you live in secret. We're all very good at putting on a show, for the most part. We have a certain pressure on us, external pressures that cause us, for the most part, to conform, even when we are at our spiritual weak points, but how do you make sure you change what you're like in secret? How do you make sure that what you're living by, what is governing, is according to the word of God, even when no one else can see? The only way to change what you do is to change how you think. It's how you think that determines what you love, and what you love determines how you live, especially how you live in secret. Speaking of the man that has the evil eye, Solomon said in Proverbs 23 verse 7, "For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he." As he thinks in his heart, that's the man.

So the transformation of life does not come simply by effort. It doesn't come simply by living according to certain maxims. There needs to be, in the language of the apostle in Romans 12, a renewing of the mind. The mind needs renewal. It needs to be changed constantly and the only thing that changes it is the word of God. The Apostle Paul was concerned with the mind of believers. I've already referenced Romans 12, but go back to Philippians 2, you'll see this. In terms of helping the church live as she should, it wasn't just about giving details and saying make sure this looks right, make sure you order yourself by this rule, and so on and so forth. Chapter 2, verse 5, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." What mind? Referring to Christ, "Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men." And so on and so forth, "he humbled himself," becomes "obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." There is a mentality of humility. There is a framework that is governing.

So as he seeks to deal with the issues in this church that he loves, he has to get to the mind. He must address the mind. And we've read in chapter 4 of some of the conflict and the individuals involved in the conflict in that church, but it's absolutely crucial that their mind is where it needs to be. The mind needs to be renewed. The mind needs to be changed. The mind needs to be like the mind of the Lord Jesus. You will become what you think about. Where your mind is will reveal the true nature of the person. It's very hard to hide it. And again, we can do it for moments, in public, in certain settings. We're very good at that. But what is going on in the home? What is the truth in the home? What is the truth in secret? So, this morning, as I turn your attention to verses 8 and 9 of Philippians 4, I've titled the message simply, "Putting God First in Thoughts and Actions." Putting God First in Thoughts and Actions. Yes, God first across the board. Not just paying lip service, not just singing, "I surrender all," but a true life which exhibits the fact that God is first right into the way in which we think, and of course then manifest in how we live. I have three heads, it's really simple, I'm not gonna make this complicated. We have our meditation in verse 8, we have our occupation in verse 9, and then the reconciliation in verse 9 as well. I'll just hinge your thoughts here on these simple ideas as we look at this text for a brief time this morning.

Our meditation. Verse 8, "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things." It's not just our activity that matters to God. Our thinking. Our thinking. He cares about what goes on in the mind. He is Lord of the mind. We are to love the Lord our God with all of our heart, mind, soul, and strength. The mind matters. So the entire word of God has been given to address the mind so that the mind, the inner part, is changed, is renewed, is brought into conformity in a way that brings glory to God. The mind is crucial.

When David was, as it were, handing over the kingdom to his son, Solomon, in 1 Chronicles 28, as he addresses him in the context there, he says, 1 Chronicles 28 verse 9, "And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind." So you're to know the God of your father, serve him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind for... Now why does the mind matter? Is it not just enough that Solomon emulate his father outwardly? Why does the mind matter? "The LORD searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts: if thou seek him, he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever." So, David instructs his son. David puts his finger on something that is more than his son simply emulating his father in terms of how to run or govern the nation. Your thought life, your imaginations are seen by God. What goes on in your mind is not hidden from God. Make sure you serve him with a willing mind. A willing mind is just another way of saying a servile mind, a mind that is surrendered, right? A surrendered mind. And again, I go back to this, if the mind is not changed, if it's not coming from there, then we're going to fall short, especially in how we live in the secret place.

Our Lord Jesus, it was prophesied concerning him, the Messiah, in Isaiah 11, I'll read to you the opening verses of Isaiah 11. It says, "And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding," again, this is something that's not just governing how he lives outwardly, it's governing the thought life, "the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD." There's a focus there on the mind. The Messiah in the outworking of his life, in his full surrender to the Father, in his obedience on our behalf, it comes from this mind that is informed and governed and led by the Spirit and is acceptable before the Father. Spirit of wisdom and understanding, counsel and might, knowledge and the fear of the Lord, "And shall make him," of course the product of this, "shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the LORD: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth."

So how he governs, how he leads is coming from this mind that is in conformity to the Father's will and we know this, we know that Jesus, as he conducted his life, was entirely, his whole being was given over to the will of the Father, and the way in which that was developed was through a life that had been entirely given to the scriptures. You can't just have it in your head. You can't cause the renewing without that which does the renewing. You can't change the affections. You can't alter the behavior. You can't cause there to be a true effectual transformation without the word of God. It is the word of God that is quick and powerful. It's the word of God that transforms the life, the word. And so when Satan comes with temptations to the Lord Jesus Christ, immediately he goes to the scripture for his defense.

His mind rested on the word. The apostle, here, in giving instruction to the church, in verse 8, at the very end of that, you see he says, "think on these things." So just before we look at these, and we'll just look at them briefly, but before he lists them, he said, "think on these things." The grammar of that is in the imperative. In other words, this isn't a suggestion. He's not saying, "You know, I suggest if you want to have a peaceful life, you give this some consideration." He's giving us command. He's exhorting. "This is what you must do. Think on these things. Dwell on these things. Take these things into account. Evaluate these things. Let them be habitually your practice every hour of the day. Outside of these things is off limits. Within these things is the will of God."

So allow these things to steer your mind and if the mind then is governed by God in this way, the life will be too. If you get this wrong, if you think the Christian life is a series of do's and don'ts, and there are do's and don'ts, right? I've just read here the end of verse 8 and told you it's in the imperative, that's, "Do this," right? There's command there. But if you just stop there, and you make the Christian life purely a series of do's, and all it is about is the outward coming into conformity with whatever the doing suggests, you're going to miss the point; at best, you're going to conduct your life in an outward form that no one sees any problem with, but you will do it with resentment, there will be a lack of joy, there will be a lack of any real meaning and glory to God in the doing. You won't be

able to see how God is glorified in these things. You just will be, by sheer determination, endeavoring to conform your life.

So think on these things. Well, what? What does he say? "Whatsoever things are true," that is, that which is real, that which is genuine, not that which is fake, not that which is false. Don't spend your time thinking on the fake or the false. Don't give your mind to that which is deceiving or possibly deceptive. Give yourself to that which you know is true. Now right at the head here should be a giveaway when he begins with "true, whatsoever things are true." It should bring to our minds, well, true, what do I think of as a Christian, what do I think of when I think of what's true or truth? What do I think of? Well, of course, we've already said the word of God, but even more illustrative, I think, is to consider John 14, verse 6. Many of you know our Lord Jesus saying plainly, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." So this verse at its head is pointing us not merely to the things contained in the letter of the law, but as revealed through the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is truth. He is truth incarnate. And so when we're considering these things and moving through them, we see how they are reflected in the Lord Jesus Christ.

All that he did was true. What he gave himself was to that which is true. Constantly exhibiting truth. And we spend so many hours considering, I mean even, let me just check you here, not intending to make you feel guilty, but let me just check you here. How much of your time in the last week has been spent in discussion about what occurred Saturday a week ago, and in those particular details, you don't know exactly what's going on? They're just conspiracies, thoughts, maybe this is involved, you know, different ideas, meditating, thinking about, discussing things concerning what happened, I'm not suggesting that I have any idea what happened. I don't. This is my point, though. We can spend a lot of our time thinking, and musing, and mulling conspiracies, inside jobs, this, that, who's at fault here, all the rest of it, all these things. Number one, we have no authority over this thing. I mean, this is outside our jurisdiction. We haven't had any control over this. This isn't in our power. Number two, we don't have access to all the information. Number three, we spend so much of our energy about things we simply cannot prove. We don't know. And I get it, it's hard to stop our minds but I'm using that as an illustration in which I imagine most people here have given some thought to what happened just over a week ago, and in all likelihood, because I've been in those conversations, and I'm saying, we don't know. I don't know. I don't know. I have no idea. I don't have a clue. I just know what happened in terms of the objective facts that are there before everyone, but you don't know what's going on.

And we spend so much, and that's just one, one instant. Every single, every single week there are things of a similar, of a similar nature that we spend our times thinking, what's going on? And we don't know. And I'm telling you that if you want to live above these things in the joy of the Lord, despite these things, we must more fully, deliberately, purposefully keep our mind on what we know is true. What do you know is true? You know God is in heaven. You know God is sovereign. You know he's over it. You know if there's something negative or sinful, the full story's not being told, whatever, you know he's aware of it and you can rest in the knowledge that he will bring the hidden things of darkness to light in due course. If not in this life, certainly in the judgment to come. And

that's just one example. Don't hone in just on that. Right across the board, we spend all sorts of energy on things we do not know are true and it causes anxiety and worry. Think about something that happens in your health and again, you start thinking about that and your mind goes to places that are not true. It hasn't been realized. You're trying to build bridges to cross rivers that may not even exist. This is a waste of our energy.

Think of how our Lord Jesus considered the cross. Think of how his mind went to the cross. We read nothing in his expressions about what might take place or how it might look. His mind dwelt on what he knew was true and he expressed that to the disciples. "I'm going to Jerusalem. I must suffer many things, be betrayed," and so on. He just articulated what was true. His mind did not go into areas of "what if." He just thought on what was true. Those things that are honest as well, that is things that are honorable. Things which can be venerated or revered because of their character. Things worthy of respect. To put it, to get away from the negative then, getting our mind off the dishonorable things. Getting our mind out of the dirt. Getting our mind out of the things that are not exalted. As I say, not honorable. So what things are honorable? Think again about where your mind goes. Think about it in terms of relationally. Think of how sometimes your boss says or does something, you begin to start to think about what's the motive behind that, and it's not honorable. This is illustrative of the point. Stay away from what is not honorable.

Just. That is righteous, same word there that often we understand as being righteous. Things that are righteous, things which are in accordance to God's word. Things which are fair, that which is acceptable before God, received by God. Whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are righteous, let our mind dwell there. This is what God wants. This is how God has revealed his will. Let me dwell on that.

Whatsoever things are pure, Things that are chaste rather than impure. That which is wholesome, that which is untainted, that which is not contaminated. We are to think on these things that are not made filthy. You start considering that. Looking at your life, "Do I feed my mind that which helps to make it think upon what is pure?" Now you can't control all that you see and hear. You can't but when we willingly give ourselves to things that are impure, we are not helping ourselves in this exhortation.

Think on these things. Our Lord Jesus saw a lot of impurity. A lot of impurity and he ministered among people who were full of impurity, and he perceived all their impurities. We can't avoid it. We're not to lead and you say, "Well, if I'm to live this out, I'm going to live like a monk." This isn't biblical. We don't argue for monasticism. We don't argue for cutting yourself off to the degree that you say, "This text is going to take such a preeminence that anything that may go against it, I'm going to remove myself entirely from. So I'm going to live in a cave, like an ascetic, away out in the middle of nowhere, away from everyone, just me and God." This isn't biblical. We know this isn't biblical.

So there are many impurities. Our Lord Jesus saw them, he was around them, but not inviting it, not feeding it, not encouraging it, not giving our assent to it, endeavoring then to maintain that which is chaste and we must keep this ever before us in such an impure

world. Lovely. Also to think of those things that are lovely, those things that are pleasing. These things that are sweet, attractive, beautiful in God's eyes, this is what we're to think about. Not ugly, not the ugly things of the world. Not meditating in those.

Things that are of good report, well spoken of, commendable, that which has a positive reputation, that which is credible. Think about that.

Then he says, "if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise." Virtue, that which is morally excellent, that which reflects the holiness of God. Praise, things that are deserving of admiration, things which can be lauded without shame before God. You're not praising them and then thinking, you know, if Jesus was here, could I praise it? No, you only praise that which you could do in his presence. You can bring it before God as a matter of praise.

"Think on these things." That's the encouragement. That's the command. That's what we're having put before us and I say Jesus Christ lived this out. He did it without hiding away. He did it while being engaged in the world. But this is what we're saying, we're saying we have to live in this world and keep our minds. Keep our minds. And I'm telling you now that the tool by which you can do that is the word of God. You will fail. If you're not in the Bible every day, there's no way you can fulfill what this text exhorts. It's impossible. This is part of the reason why we read the word of God and why we are to meditate in the word of God, because reading, I was saying this to the young people, sometimes when we read the word of God, we are reading it the way we, in the presence of others, someone's trying to talk to us and we're on our cell phones, and our spouse is trying to communicate to us, and we're on the cell phone, but we're kind of listening, but we've been in that position where it has to be repeated because we haven't quite gotten what was said. And in one sense, you can say, I am listening, but you're not. It's not registering and you could go away, and if you were quizzed about what exactly did that person say, you wouldn't be fully aware of the details. That's because you're looking at something else. You're distracted. And yes, you're listening in part, but the distraction is causing it to be impossible for you to really retain what is being said to you.

I use that to illustrate how we read the word of God. There are many people who don't read the word of God at all, and I've mentioned this recently, so I'm not going to beat it again, but it's impossible for you if you're ignoring the word of God, you cannot live the Christian life in any semblance of victory, of any experience of peace, if you're neglecting the word of God. It can't be done. But you can still read the word of God and not meditate. Meditation is where, as you're reading, you're thinking, or at least you're taking away. Maybe you read through it, but you make a little note. This is what I do. As I read through the word of God, I'm trying to get through, but I make a note on those verses that have seemed to jump out, where I want to stay and sit for a while, I make a note of them and I don't sit then because I won't get through my reading. So I read on through, but I make a note of the things that jump out and I go back, and I think about it, and I meditate upon it, and I pray over it. And those are the things I take away. Those truths are the ones I can take away with me.

And this is what we're to do and without that, then, we can't think on those things that are true and honest and so on. It's the word of God, the renewing of our minds by the word of God. Every generation faces challenges, challenges in committing to and fulfilling this exhortation. I think sometimes we say we live in a particular generation where this is harder than before and I think there's some truth there, I do. I think there's some truth. But I also think it can be used as an excuse. We simply need to be absolutely committed to a mind that is in conformity to the will of God, bringing all that is before us and under our control within reason, as it were, not isolating ourselves away entirely, but being careful about what we put in front of us and who, whose presence we are in, who may be in some way not helping us fulfill this text.

So our meditation. Secondly, our occupation. What are we then to do? Verse 9. Not just allow these things to govern in our mind, it's then to be worked out. Verse 9, "Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do." There's a clear connection here between verse 8 and 9. What had they learned, received and heard and seen in Paul? Did they see someone who neglected the scriptures? No. Did they see someone who paid lip service to the word of God? No. When the word of God exhorts that we are to deny ourselves daily, take up the cross and follow him, did they see that in Paul? Yes. In conversation with them, was there any sense in which this man is all talk? No. He already bore the scars. This very church, those in Philippi had seen him suffer for the gospel. The Macedonian call came to him. He was assuredly convinced that the Lord had led him to go that way. So off he goes to Macedonia, comes into Philippi. It appears there's no synagogue where he would usually begin his efforts and so having no synagogue, you understand if there are any Jews at all, there would be a synagogue if there were at least 10 households, but there's obviously not 10 Jewish households here, so there's no synagogue. Well, if there are any Jews, then they'll be by the river and there by the river he found a group of women praying.

Praying, what were they praying for? By the rivers of Babylon, they sat down and wept when they remembered Zion. And so these women, what are they doing? They're gathering there, they're praying that God would come and that he would provide, provide a place of worship there in Philippi, bring his truth to Philippi, and they had no idea God was answering that prayer sending Paul with the gospel. And Lydia, hearing the word, her heart is opened. As she attends unto the things that are spoken by Paul, her life is transformed. And from there they have prayer meetings. One day as they're going in prayer, this girl who keeps on trying to intervene and shouting things that are distracting and so on, Paul turns and speaks to her, and she's converted and delivered. They end up in prison because of that and put in the prison there at Philippi. Will Paul relent then? Will Paul and Silas give up? Will they say, "Okay, we'll not preach anymore. We're not willing to suffer for this." No. And so they're put in prison. They're beaten with many stripes and as Dr. Paisley, when preaching on that passage one time, he referred, as he preached a message on that portion, he called it the strangest duet of all time. The strangest duet of all time was Paul and Silas singing at midnight, there in the prison, rejoicing in the Lord, bleeding from their wounds, but still rejoicing. God comes there in the middle of that night, intervenes, the doors of the prisons are opened, The prison, the man who's in charge of it all, fears for his own life, is ready to fall upon his own sword

and Paul, being aware, cries out, "Do thyself no harm, for we are all here." And he turns and he says, "What must I do to be saved?" How did he know? How did the Philippian jailer know? Because in the singing of those songs, the gospel was being proclaimed. In the joy, despite the wounds and all that they had experienced, there was a message coming clearly to that jailer, "These men are different. They think differently, they act differently. I've never met anyone like them. What must I do to be saved?" "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved and thy house."

They had seen it up close, this church at Philippi. "Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do." Imbibe it. Don't just know this stuff, practice it. And he's reiterating really what chapter 3, verse 17 says. If you go back to chapter 3 of this epistle, chapter 3, verse 17, "Brethren, be followers together of me," right, he's encouraging them there again. If you want to walk, if you want to go on with God, "be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample." So mark, and the idea of that word mark, we get our word scope from it. So you can get some idea of the sense of it, which is a sense of locking on. Locking on to examples that help us in the objective. Lock on. "Be followers together with me and when I'm not there, in my absence, the things that you're not sure about, mark, lock on, focus, put your scope on them which walk so as ye have us. Keep your focus on those who you can follow as an example. Those whose minds are governed by whatsoever things are true and so on, and whose lives then walk in accordance with that, in consistency with that, make sure you follow those kind of people." Yes, those things which you have both learned, need to be taught, and in that instruction there needs to be a receiving, right? There's a humility here, isn't there? You learn by hearing, but there has to be a receiving. And what you hear, you need to receive. "And heard and seen in me, do."

So who are you emulating? Whose life do you try to follow? Who are the heroes that you have, the people that you want to try and be like? If I say, give me a Christian you know, name a Christian you know, that you want to be like, do you have someone? Don't go to excess. Don't say, "Well, I don't know anyone who's exactly like Jesus." Of course, you're not going to know anyone who's exactly like Jesus but you can know people who you can see something in them that they're trying, that there's a real effort, that there's a conformity, a humility, a resignation to God, a desire to do what is right, a humility that comes and acknowledges when they've done wrong, certain characteristics that aren't like that which you see in the world or among carnal, worldly Christians, if we can use that kind of terminology. The people who are the real deal, who seek to walk with God, read his word, talk freely about the things of Christ, find it easy to speak spiritually, who make themselves available to do good, desire to serve in whatever fashion they can. These kind of people, the people who make you feel guilty because they're always there no matter what. They turn up, they show up, they're committed, they're resolved. They have this air of thanksgiving. They haven't lost the atmosphere of gratitude for what Jesus has done. The passing of the years has not caused their love and affection for Jesus to wane. They're still amazed at what Jesus has accomplished for them. They still stand, in a sense, unable to comprehend, "Why should he die for me?"

Those are the people. Sometimes we find them in the pages of history and I think we can learn a lot from history, but I will caution, I will caution, you need the flesh and blood examples. Let me ask you it this way then: can you be such an example? You can be. The question is, do you want to be? If you're in that church and Paul's saying, "be followers together of me and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an example. Mark others. In my absence, mark others," would you be reading that asking yourself, "I wonder am I one of them?" Am I one of them and if I'm not, should I not endeavor to be? Are we going to sit and complain about the spirituality of our young people without giving them the examples that they need, the flesh and blood examples they need? Are we going to lament that they seem so worldly and so interested in other things without giving to them something better to attain to, putting before them something higher? It's easy to find fault. It's not so easy to give them something better to emulate. Oh, God help us. Giving ourselves to those things which we have learned, received and heard and seen in the godly and doing them.

Finally, our reconciliation. Reconciliation, verse 9 as well, "and the God of peace shall be with you." A sense of this reconciling experience where the God of peace is with you. You, a fallen child of Adam, can experience and know and enjoy the God of peace, the presence of the God of peace. Now, this text is not suggesting that these people are, if they think this way and do as this, then they'll be saved. It's not suggesting that in order for the God of peace to be with them, that it's all dependent on their thinking and their doing. Don't misunderstand. But these people who are already justified by grace, who are saved, who know the Lord, Paul's desire is that they might be conscious of the God of peace and his presence. He wants them to be aware of it.

Now what threatens this peace? Sin threatens this peace. Sin of the mind, sin of action threatens peace. You can do everything that everyone expects you to do outwardly, and yet if your mind is in the sewer, you will not have a sense of the peace of God. If you're questioning God, arguing against God, not resigned to God, angry at his sovereign control over affairs, how things have worked out, the fact that you haven't got what you wanted, if any of that kind of complaint will drive from you any sense of peace. When we trifle with sin, when we make allowances for carnal things, it's not that we lose salvation, but we lose the sense of it. Is this not what David desired in Psalm 51, having sinned against God? He confesses his sin and what does he say? "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation. Restore that which I've lost." He's not getting re-saved. It's the restoration of the fruits of salvation, the fruit of a life of walking with God, a fruit of a life of being in obedience to God.

The peace of God. Knowing it. Experiencing it. This is building upon what he's already said, is it not, in verse 6? "Be careful for nothing," that is be anxious for nothing, "but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God and the peace of God which passeth all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." So he's already given exhortation in terms of that which causes anxiety. The cares of this life, bring everything to God in prayer. Do it with thanksgiving. Don't do it in complaint. Do it with thanks to God. Bring every concern and care with a spirit of gratitude to God that he is in control, that he does good to his people.

Make your request known to God and as you bear all your burdens before the throne of grace, the peace of God will keep your hearts and minds. But there are those who pray and won't do. You can be like a Pharisee and you can have times of prayer and yet you're holding back. You can name your concerns before God and list all of your prayer requests but still not enjoy this peace and so Paul is supplementing what he's already said. Yes, bring your anxieties to God, leave them there. The peace of God then will keep your hearts and mind, preserve you so that you can maintain a sense of peace and the presence of God in your life. But also this, bringing your mind to conformity to his will. Giving your whole being, the internal life, aligned with the word. Endeavoring then to follow the best examples that you see and the God of peace shall be with you. You'll not lack a sense of his nearness.

This may be one of the most common experiences, a lack of peace. Christians send you a card, someone gives you counsel, you read your own Bible, but you can't receive the truth that you're being given. There's something in you militating against the Lord and you don't have his peace. It's not meant to be that way. The problems of life are not meant to derail you. The problems of life are not meant to cause you to abandon your trust in the Lord. The problems of life are instruments in God's hands to drive you to him. There are ways in which we get exposed, ways in which our hearts, the true nature of them, come to light, where we realize we thought we were going on with God, and all of a sudden, all that illusion we've been living under just has been shattered in pieces. And there's a reset in our hearts. Maybe some of you are going through it.

So what does Paul say? What does he want us to do? If I can summarize it in his language in Colossians 3, "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God." Don't live with this ambition for just earthly things. Lift up your mind to consider what's his will for my life. What does he want to do with my life? "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead and your life is hid with Christ in God." The amazing thing is, when we get our mind to where it needs to be, our hands and feet and all our faculties follow, and then it doesn't matter what our circumstances are, we can have more peace than those who have all the things that men could wish for. If you live like this, if you live like verse 8 and 9, and you imbibe all the implications of it, getting your mind to that which is true and honest and so on, and doing that which is best illustrated for you in Christ and in his people, you live like this, you can be free even in a prison. If you don't live like this, you can be imprisoned, even though you're free. And that's how many believers live, they live imprisoned. Imprisoned to sin. Imprisoned to the past. Imprisoned to their feelings. Imprisoned to their desires. Imprisoned to unmet expectations of various sorts. And they're imprisoned because their mind's constantly thinking about what hasn't happened, or the things that may occur but have yet to occur. All things that are not true, not honest, not just, not pure, so on, you fill your mind with those things and you don't give your heart to follow the best examples and you live imprisoned in your mind. Whereas the man who wrote this, who was imprisoned and that was seen by the church and witnessed by them, he was a free man in prison. It did not take away his song. It did not rob him of his joy.

At midnight, with the wounds bleeding sore from him, he and his companion Silas can sing. Sing. And everyone in the prisons is like, "I want whatever they're on," but what they were on, but something that changes the heart, changes the mind, changes the life, and enables you to live above the world and its circumstances. In a sense, in some way, invincible. Oh, not that you can't be killed, but on the threat upon your life, it will not touch your convictions or your commitment and Paul can say, "You can threaten my life, you can take my life, but you cannot take my commitment to Jesus. My mind is his. My heart is his. My life is his. If you end it, it's absent from the body, it's present with the Lord." Are you there? Are you surrendered? Or are you limping along, a Christian without joy? Bring your whole being, surrender it, offer it, "Here am I, Lord. Have your will. Have thine own way." May God give grace.

Let's pray.

The Lord is good and ready to forgive and plenteous in mercy unto all who call upon his name. Maybe you've been wandering for some weeks and months, neglecting the word, not praying with any real heart, not cultivating the relationship you have with God through Christ. This morning, I urge you, sincerely encourage you, take these moments here in the pew and then take a little time later today, and with an open Bible, maybe it's Psalm 51, pray through the language, get your heart right before God and get to that place where your joy and peace is restored. God, help us, we pray. We are frail. We are weak. And as our Lord Jesus taught us, without him we can do nothing. So Father, give much, give much of your Spirit to help us, aid us in these moments and may each one in this congregation, first of all, be saved and have their sins forgiven, and then walk in the joy and peace of thy salvation. May our light so shine before men that they may see our good works. May we be examples to others to seek the Lord and live for Christ. May the grace of the Lord Jesus, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Spirit be the portion of all the people of God, now and evermore. Amen.