

Session 2

September 8, 2019

A DAILY PURSUIT

Philippians 4:4-9

Simplicity in the Christian life doesn't mean hard wooden pews at church, or no modern conveniences at home. Rather, it refers to a lifestyle that keeps Christ at the center and the clutter of the world at a distance. I prefer to think of the *simple* Christian life as the *consistent* Christian life; where the highs aren't too high and the lows aren't too low, and the believer is predictably and steadily moving ahead in his spiritual journey.

In his most personal and affectionate letter, Paul reminds the believers at Philippi to stay focused on Christ and the joy that consistent Christian living brings. Three main traits characterize this lesson on the simple life available in Christ.

Rejoice (vv. 4-5). You may remember that the theme of Philippians is *joy*. After all, Paul uses the term five times in this short letter and tells the believers there to *rejoice* nine times. What you may not remember is that Paul wrote those words from a Roman prison cell! The irony of that situation reminds us that joy is a deeper, more resonant emotion than happiness, which is always based on our immediate circumstances. Simply put, one can be unhappy...and still be filled with abiding joy. The resulting *graciousness* mentioned in verse 5 refers to “restraint on the passions, general soberness of living, being free from all excesses” (Albert Barnes, ca. 1870). These characteristics (that the world should see in all of us) represent the very essence of simplicity. Why should we live that way? Because the appearance of Christ—and the shadow of judgment that accompanies Him—is imminent.

Relax (vv. 6-7). Echoing the exact words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 6:25), the apostle reminds the church that believers ought not to worry about anything, but rather ought to pray about everything! Our connection to God is always prayerful and should always be present (see 1 Thess. 5:17). The differentiation between the more general *prayer* and the more specific *petition* reminds us that not all prayer is asking, but some of it is. I think the older translation, *supplication* (v. 6), better captures Paul's emotion. It connotes an urgent, earnest, heart-felt pleading with God. But the heavy weight of supplication should always be countered with generous amounts of thanksgiving. Verse 7 reminds us that prayer helps us replace human worry with God-given peace that rises above our own understanding and stands guard around both our thoughts and our feelings. This “guarding” both protects us from attack by the enemy, and secures us in Christ, right where we belong.

Reflect (vv. 8-9). As Paul's letter winds down, he summarizes what should characterize the Christ-centered life. He already encouraged Christ-followers to have the *mind of Christ* (Phil. 2:5 ff). While that passage tells us *how* we should think, these verses tell us *what* to think. The list of good gifts to reflect upon are equally as characteristic of Christ as His humility is in chapter 2. Notice that all are positive, and none are negative. This is not meant to “sugarcoat” the difficulties we face, or to counter the world with some kind of positive thinking. Rather, it is meant to express the supreme confidence we have in Christ and the abundant life He gives. Verse 9 is particularly fitting, as it completes the list of simple steps to the simple, consistent, Christ-centered life. It's not enough to rejoice, and pray, and meditate on good things. One must

put these principles into practice. Paul was a model of simple living. He learned the principle of contentment even when confined to a prison cell (Phil. 4:11). For that reason, he could encourage them to do what they learned, received, heard and seen in Paul's teaching (see also 1 Cor. 4:16 and 11:1, where Paul encourages believers to "imitate me").