

The Promise of Peace

By Don Green

sermonaudio.com

Bible Verse: Philippians 4:8-9
Preached on: Sunday, January 24, 2021

Truth Community Church
4183 Mt. Carmel Tobasco Road
Cincinnati, OH 45255

Website: truthcommunitychurch.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/tcomm

Our text today comes from chapter 4, verses 8 and 9, and it's a very important and a very familiar text and yet one that has significance that I think by the help of the Holy Spirit we will see goes far beyond what we've been accustomed to attribute to it.

Verses 8 and 9 of Philippians 4.

8 Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. 9 The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

Now it's important to understand in the broader context of this text that Paul is encouraging the church with a sense of the peace of God and a promise of the peace of God in the midst of anxiety. The prior verse in verse 7 says, "the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." And so there is an emphasis on the peace of God in this passage. It is in response to the anxiety that the church was experiencing at the time and no doubt is still a struggle for the people of God as we kind of reverse engineer a little bit here. Look at verse 6, he says, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God." And then the peace of God, surpassing all comprehension will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Now I rather suspect that each one of us would love to have our lives dominated by a sense of tranquility and a sense that all will be well for us in Christ, but I'm not sure that we have fully grasped how that peace is obtained. As we saw last time, it's not simply a matter of going to God and coming forth and just laying everything out and all of our worries and complaints without any sense of perspective about who he is and who it is that we're speaking about. We addressed that last time. But there is also a critical factor that is added to it here in our text and I'm going to say something that may sound a little bit odd to some of your ears anyway, but is really really foundational. As Christians, you and I, we must think about the way that we think. We must think about the way that we think and as odd as that may sound, it is a very fundamental presupposition for the way that you live the Christian life.

Over in 2 Corinthians 10, just by way of introduction a little bit, 2 Corinthians 10:5 says that, "We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ." You see, your mind is part of what God has given you to serve and to glorify him. It is not simply a matter of external behavior that constitutes Christian living, but the way that you think and the things about which you think are fundamental to glorifying God and to living the Christian life and incidentally, to experiencing the peace of God which is described in this passage. As you consider the text again, again we're just looking at it in a preface sort of way here, at the end of verse 9 after saying think about these things, practice these things, then and only then does Paul say and the God of peace will be with you.

So the peace of God just doesn't indiscriminately happen to every believer. There is a certain kind of life in which God blesses with his peace. There is a certain kind of mind that experiences the peace of God that other kinds of minds do not experience. And so, my friends, here's the challenge for us today, is that as Christians you and I must understand that we have to proactively discipline our minds to think in a proper way. Let me say that again. We have to proactively discipline our minds so that we think about proper things because what you think about determines who you are, and what you think about determines what you do. And that is easily missed, easily misunderstood, but I think we could say that, you know, we all have a sense that we're to glorify God in our behavior, but it is important for us to realize that God did not simply make you a material being. It's not simply your physical existence that matters to God, it's what's going on in your mind and in your heart. Jesus said that the greatest commandment was to love the Lord your God with all of your soul, with all of your strength, and with all of your mind. So your mind is to be given over to the glory of God, your mind is to be given over into righteous thinking, and that's affected by, the way that you think is affected by the intake that your mind has, what it is that you watch, what it is that you read, what it is that you think about, and where you let your imaginations go. All of those things are brought under the umbrella of this command that God has given us here to think in a proper way.

Now I'm going to say something without any fear of contradiction, any fear of any real contradiction, even though you might not initially agree with the broad sweep of the conclusion that is implied by it. My friends, the way that you think about God, the way that you think about self, yourself, the way that you think about Christ, the way that you think about sin and judgment, the way that you think about other people around you, the way that you think about the world, the way that you think about eternity, all of those things are highly profoundly significant. All of those things, and many more, are revealed in the word of God and they are primary themes in the word of God, and God not only commands you to do things, he commands you to think truly, to think rightly. And I ask you, where in the world are you going to find right thinking about God and Christ and sin and judgment? Where in the world in popular entertainment are you going to find right thinking about self and others and the world? Where are you going to find anything in the world that rightly causes you to think about what eternity is going to be like? Where are you going to find anything in the world that gives you clear, definitive, trustworthy

answers about what happens to your soul when you die? Because you're all going to die if the Lord doesn't return first. Every one of us is going to be the subject of a memorial service one day sooner or later. Some of us with just the passage of time, it's going to come sooner than for others.

Well, what do you think about all of that? Do you have a sense of clarity about these things? Beloved, it's highly significant because the way that you think about such things determines the course of your life. It determines the way that you live because the way that you think about things like this determines the affections of your heart and what you love and what you give yourself to. If you highly value Christ, if you highly value his word, if you highly feel a sense of your own sin and guilt before God, you're going to have a high value that you place upon the Christ and the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. You're going to place a high value on the fact that God sent his Son to be the Savior of men, to be the Savior of the world. If you don't highly value your soul, if you don't think sin is serious, if you don't anticipate an eternity to come where there is either eternal blessedness for Christians and eternal damnation for everyone else, if you don't think about those things you're not going to properly prize the Lord Jesus Christ. And that thinking is found in his word and if you don't highly value the things of Christ and the things of God's word, then you're going to live according to different priorities, worldly ungodly priorities. Your life will be squandered and you very well may end in that sense of judgment that we read earlier from Matthew 25, "Depart from Me."

Now look, I'm just here to tell you, I'm not trying to be high-handed, heavy-handed here, I'm just trying to tell you and trusting the Spirit of God to apply it to your heart, that things like this ultimately matter and the way that you think about them and the importance that you assign to them is going to determine everything else in your life. We are talking about that which brings you to a fork in the road and you either determine whether you're going to go to the left or to the right in response to God's word in response to this.

Now let me just do a little bit of a contrast here just by way of a, you know, the clumsy way in which I speak. Let's contrast what we've been describing over the past few minutes with a different approach, a different approach that is really, that is really only interested in life insofar as you can get what you want out of it; that scripture and Christ become a means to another end by which God gives you what you want, gets you out of your problems and solves your difficulties and just makes life easy for you, and what you want is just limited to the carnal appetites and your experience in the life here and now without regard to spiritual matters of sin and judgment, without regard to matters of heaven and hell, and everything is just focused on right now without regard to the long-term consequences of the decisions and the lifestyle that you lead, without regard to what is actually true. "You know, look, it feels good so whether it's true or not is secondary to me." Oh my. Oh my, that is a trapdoor just waiting to open under your feet and drop you down into a Christ-less eternity.

So what I'm here to say to you, beloved, all by way of introduction to this wonderful text is that there is a presupposition involved here, and the presupposition that we are

articulating this morning is this, is that you and I must think about the way that we think. We must step back and contemplate what it is that we think about, what is our authority for what is true, and how is it driving our priorities. It is arguably the most foundational decision that faces us in the course of our life. What is our standard for truth? What is our priority in life? And how do we evaluate whether those things are true or not? And all of those things are brought to bear in this brief text that gives us a comprehensive approach to thinking and to doing, and attaches a promise of God's peace to the end of it.

So let me just point this out to you in an overview fashion to let you see how comprehensive this text is. Everything that you think about is brought under the authority of God's word by what it says. Everything that you do is brought under the authority of God's word by what it says. And my friends, this is just astonishing to me. I never cease to be amazed at the infinite consequences that an individual text of scripture can bring to bear upon us. This brief text gives you a comprehensive approach to the way that you think.

Look at it there in verse 8. We're going to, again, just kind of do another pass-over of it and then we'll go to more detail in a moment. He says there in verse 8, "Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things." It's a comprehensive statement saying, "This is what you must think about, the things that are honorable and true and right and pure." God's word commands you to think in a particular way. In addition to giving us a comprehensive approach to thinking, this brief text gives us a comprehensive approach to doing, in what we do with our lives.

Verse 9 says, the Apostle Paul speaking to the church at Philippi says, "The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things," do these things. Look at the life of the Apostle Paul, look at the life that he modeled and model your life after that, and we'll talk about these things more in the time to come. But here's what I want you to see. In verse 8, you have a comprehensive definitive approach to thinking that gives way and the sequence is always this pattern in scripture, thinking leads to doing and this text gives us a comprehensive approach to the way that we live life.

Now why did I go to all of this trouble to introduce the text like that? That's a good question. Here's what I want you to understand. In part, beloved, and sometime I should do a message or a few messages on how to listen to a sermon. It would be good for me to do that. But in part the reason that I've introduced it this way is that I want to develop your sense of expectation about what the text is telling you and requiring from you, and what it is calling you to. This is lofty and it is utterly foundational. This is not an incidental matter. The word of God is telling us, "This is how you are to think and how you are to act in every aspect of your life." There is nothing in our lives that is outside of this. Nothing in the mental realm is outside of the call of scripture here. Nothing in what we do with our lives is beyond the call of God in this.

So what we find is this. Paul prefaces, look at the promise there at the end of verse 9. that will be our final point for this morning later. He says, "Think these things, do these things, and as a consequence, the God of peace will be with you." You will know God's promise of peace is given to those who think and who do in accordance with what he has said. And it is no surprise to me whatsoever, it is no surprise to me that many Christians are struggling these days because as you see their preoccupation with earthly matters. Well, these earthly matters are not to be the preoccupation of thinking, and when your thinking is preoccupied in matters that are other than what God has commanded, what do you think is going to happen? Poof, the sense of peace will wander away from you, and it's because you are not doing with your mind what you are supposed to be doing. And you have to trace it back and take accountability and not blame it on the circumstances of life or social things, not blame it on that, say, "If I am experiencing a lot of anxiety, maybe I'm not thinking right, and maybe I need to transform the way that I think and change the way that I think about everything." That would be a biblical thought for you to think.

Look over at Romans 12 and I trust that you know, I trust that the Spirit of God is helping you understand I'm on your side as I tell you these things. Romans 12:2 says, "do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect." The transformation in your life comes and begins when your mind is transformed by the word of God. That's why it is so good and so important that you are here today, and I'm encouraged that there are so many of you that long for the word of God and not to have a church be there to entertain you. Entertainment will not transform your mind. A good hearty laugh on a Sunday morning might make you feel good and release whatever is releases in your body, but it won't transform your mind into truth. Truth is serious. Truth is earnest. Truth is important and it needs to be treated that way. Even the very way that the manner in which truth is taught matters.

You know, going back a few years, there was a famous pastor whose name I won't sully my pulpit by mentioning by name, but he was known for wearing a Mickey Mouse shirt when he taught. Well, you know, I know that was supposed to be kind of cool and kind of hip. What does that communicate about truth when you are teaching in a Mickey Mouse shirt? You're saying that what I'm saying is Mickey Mouse. You're saying it's not important. You're saying this is really ultimately a joke at the end of the day. And you condition people to diminish the importance of truth merely by the way that you present yourself.

There's a reason why it says, look over in the book of Titus. I was having a related conversation with our distinguished elder chairman this week that prompts this reminder of Titus 2. Titus 2:1-2, then we're going to get into our text here today. Paul speaking to Titus says, "But as for you, speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine. Older men," from which elders and church leaders are drawn, "Older men are to be temperate, dignified, sensible, sound in faith, in love, in perseverance." The way that you think matters. The way that truth is presented matters. It's to be sensible and it's to be dignified

in communicating by the very demeanor in which it is spoken, a sense of importance and urgency that helps those around to understand that this is to be paid attention to.

So with all of that said, let's get into our text. Paul, going back to Philippians 4. If the price of an audience is the way that you dress, count me out. I want nothing to do with that. It's despicable to diminish truth for the sake of catering the applause of carnal men. That's despicable. Exalted patterns of thought and conduct enhance God's peace.

Philippians 4:6 and 7 again, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God." You see, there's this vertical aspect that it all starts with, how I approach God. I approach him with reverence. I approach him with gratitude. I approach him in faith. I believe what he has said and I submit to that and I trust him. "Lord, You sent Your Son to die for my soul. How could I do anything but believe that You have my best interest at heart? And so I'm going to pray to You in a spirit of trust and tranquility rather than anxiety or anger." There's this vertical dimension and then it becomes an inner dimension in verse 8 where he talks about in verse 8, think on these things, dwell on these things. So Paul has forbidden anxiety and he has given a different manner of thought and a different manner of vertical and inner thinking that is attached with a promise of peace. And so today's text builds on that worldview.

We have three points for this morning. Today's message is titled "The Promise of Peace," and the first point from today's text is Paul gives us, point 1, the things to think. The things to think. He starts by giving this wide ranging menu for the Christian mind. Look at it there in verse 8. He says, "Finally, brethren." With the word "finally," he indicates that he's about to summarize the duties of thought and action that he wants to bring to bear upon them. He's introducing his summary. This is going to bring everything that he's said beforehand, he's going to bring it into a final closing argument like a good attorney would do. He's bringing it to a point to be emphasized here. And don't lose sight, as I tried to mention earlier in my own approach, don't lose sight of the fact that Paul is speaking here with a sympathetic spirit to the people of God. This is in the spirit of love and assistance, not in a sharp rebuke and condemnation. You see that as he says, "Finally, brethren. My fellow brothers and sisters in Christ," he says, "Let me summarize this in a spirit of love that will help you as we move forward now as I finish up this letter." So he is about to summarize the duties of thought and action by telling them what they are to think, what they are to desire in their heart.

Now I won't have you turn there for the sake of time, but there a lot of echoes of the Sermon on the Mount in this passage that we've been looking at for a couple of weeks now. Jesus in Matthew 6:33 made a very similar thematic statement even though he expressed it in a different way when he said in Matthew 6:33, he said, "Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness and all these things will be added to you." Christ telling us what it is that we are to desire, what we are to aim our life after, our priorities and our affections. Set the kingdom of God, set the righteousness of God at the heart of your affections and then life will follow in the way that it should. Then and only then will all

these things be added to you. Well, in a like manner, Paul is saying, "Think about these things and the God of peace will be with you."

And so, you know, everybody wants peace and tranquility in their heart, the question that you need to answer for yourself is whether you want to take seriously the means by which that is attained. And Paul helps us see the multifaceted nature of what the Christian mind is to engage. Six times in this one verse he uses what's been translated in English as "whatever." Do you see it there? Whatever is true. Whatever is honorable. Whatever is right. Whatever is pure. Whatever is lovely. Whatever is of good repute. Six times that term is used and in the original language, that is a plural form. It might look like a singular in English by the way it's translated but in the original text it's plural and has the sense whatever things are like this, you think about this.

And he uses six different adjectives. It would be possible, I supposed, to do different sermons on each of the adjectives. We're not going to do that. We're just going to go through these very quickly to give you a sense of what he is saying. When he says whatever is true, whatever things are true, he's talking about that which is consistent with Christ. Christ said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except through Me." Whatever is true is found in whatever conforms to the word of God. And so immediately you realize that there is an authority that is established over your mind by which you are to think. The word of God does not commend free-thinkers who don't have a sense of obligation to think God's thoughts after him. That is not a virtue. The virtue is found in the man whose mind is sanctified and disciplined to agree with what God has revealed in scripture and in his Son. Your thinking is only right, your thinking is only right when it conforms to what God himself has said, and what God himself has revealed. Only then is your thinking true, and to think false things, to engage false things with your mind is to engage rebellion against God.

He goes on. He says whatever is honorable. Whatever is honorable. The term means that which is worthy of respect. And beloved, boy, the implications of this are so far-reaching, but part of the way that you think is that you understand this, that God has given you a mind so that you engage earnestly with things that are nobly serious, that there is a serious dimension to your thinking. It's not that a sense of humor is wrong. It's not that, you know, we don't have joyful light times with those that we love. That's not the point here. The point is more broadly speaking. What is it that determines the center of gravity in your thinking? What is the anchor point in your thinking? Is the anchor frivolity so that you never engage serious things? Or is the anchor that which is noble and high and lofty as made known in God's word? You see, this is really, this really goes everywhere. This is going about the whole way that you think about everything else. It's not any one thing that Paul is commanding thought about. He's saying that you are to contemplate what it is that you're thinking about and assess whether it's true and honorable or not.

He goes on and he says whatever is right. Again, kind of an overlapping term that that which conforms to God's standard in his word. Whatever is pure, look at it there in verse 8. Those things which are pure are those things which have unmixed moral excellence, the things that include your motives as well as matters of the outward flesh. Whatever is

lovely. Those things that please God and inspire love in others. And finally, whatever is of good repute. Those things that are praiseworthy and ring true to the highest standards.

Now those are just the adjectives. Collectively you get the sense here that whatever conforms with those things, that's what your mind is to dwell upon, that's what you are to engage in. Now let me help you understand what things it is that Paul must have had in mind as he was saying this, you know, because it's easy, in one sense, to lift this text out of context and say, "Okay, I'm just going to think about sunrises and sunsets and puppy dogs and those things are good and lovely." I don't find puppies that way but let's not go off on that tangent yet again. What is it that Paul has in mind when he's talking about what it is that we're to think about? Well, beloved, go back into what he's been saying throughout this letter. Think about it, this has to be the way that we understand this text. What is it that he has been talking about for the prior 3 ½ chapters that led up to that point? He's wanting them to build on and to reflect on what he's been saying all along.

And without going into a complete review of the entire book, what has he been emphasizing in this book? He's been emphasizing Christ. He's been emphasizing the gospel. In chapter 2, he talked about the attitude, have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, and he talked about the humiliation of Christ in verses 5 through 8. He talked about following that, he talked about the exaltation of Christ and how God lifted him to the highest place, and that every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. He goes on and he talks about his reflection on his own self in chapter 3. He looks at his self-righteousness and he rejects it. He calls it so much dung and he says there is nothing good in me, there is nothing self-righteous about me. My best in human righteousness is nothing, it is smelly refuse compared to the glory of Christ and the loftiness and the goodness of Christ. So that he says, verse 7, look at it there. This is how Paul thinks and how he reckons things. He says, "Whatever things were gain to me, those things I've reckoned them as loss for the sake of Christ." He's thinking about, he's talking about the way that he thinks about self-righteousness. He rejects it. And by contrast, the surpassing thing is Christ, the surpassing value, verse 8, chapter 3, "Knowing Christ Jesus my Lord." Verse 9, "Having a righteousness that comes from Him by faith." This is what he's thinking about. Verse 20, his view of life. He weeps in verses 18 and 19 over those whose minds are set on earthly things and by contrast he says, "Here's what I think," here's Spirit-led thinking, "Our citizenship is in heaven," and we are anticipating the return of Christ rather than living for what's in this world. And what he thinks is that that's going to "transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of his glory." There's a physical resurrection that's coming and all of his hope is staked on that reality.

Now beloved, with that in mind, understand that those things are true. Those things are honorable. Those things about Christ, those are right, those are lovely, those are of good repute. Those things are noble and worthy of the reflection of a serious Christian mind, and to engage your mind with that is a lifetime pursuit because there is infinite truth, there is infinite honor, there is infinite goodness in these things of Christ so that you can never exhaust them with your Christian thinking.

So beloved, when Christ becomes at the center of your thinking like that, and that's what your pursuit is, something starts to happen as you pursue that and desire that day after day after day, as you are actually picking up God's word and reading it. As you sit under the teaching of God's word that is given to you in an earnest and serious way and you're receiving it and not simply going through the motions of it's time for another religious exercise. "It's Sunday. I might as well be here." No, this is the engagement of the whole man with the whole of Christ and what happens is this, is that the man or the woman who embraces that as their life pursuit finds that their thinking about Christ shapes their affections and the conduct and everything else that they want out of life. You know, a struggling suffering wife perhaps caught in a, or you know, providentially placed by God in an unequally yoked marriage and the difficult that comes from that, she's going to find a much different response to those circumstances, this is just an illustration, she's going to find a much higher peace, a much different response, a much different quietness of spirit if her thoughts are anchored in Christ and his sovereign care for her soul in the midst of her hardship, she's going to have a much different response than somebody who's demanding her husband change and wants to nag him into becoming what she wants him to be. This is fundamental and take whatever situation you're facing in life and understand that it applies in the exact same way. The way that you think about Christ and the quality of thought that you give to him determines your response to everything else.

Now let me put this in a different perspective. At some point, you young people especially but it's true for all of us, at some point we need to step back and take an honest look at what it is that we entertain ourselves with, and what it is that we feed our minds through what we read or what we watch or what we engage in, you know, whatever realm of electronic things you engage yourself in. We have to take a serious inventory of that and hold it up to the light of God's word and say, "Is this true and honorable and lofty?" You know, I know, you know, that there are places where, you know, lonely people engage themselves in a lot of fiction, either a lot of fiction things or romance novels and all of that, and just use it as a complete escape from reality. Look, we have to come to grips with the fact are those things true? Well, by definition, no, they're not. They're fiction. They're not true. You know, at some point we have to say, "Well, then what do I do with that?" God's word makes this, you know, God's word kind of gets in our space here and asks us to consider, you know, what it is that we are training our mind to think about. I'm not saying you can never read a fiction book. I can tell you that if your life revolves around fiction, something is seriously wrong with your soul and you need to repent and re-examine what you're giving your life and your mind over to. If you've got a great place for fiction in your life and a very narrow limited interest, if at all, in God's word, there's no way, there's no way that you could honestly say that your life is conforming with scripture, the scripture that we're looking at here. The things that make us laugh, the things that we engage in to entertain ourselves, oh, beloved, this text is telling us to put aside carnal humor, put aside fiction, and to think in a biblical way because that kind of living is what's worthy of the gospel of Christ.

This is what God calls us to and, you know, I mean, if I were just walking in as a visitor hearing this for the first time and hearing this, I might be responding something like this, "Well, preacher, what you're saying is that I've got to come completely out of the world

to come to Christ, and I've got to forsake these things in order to embrace this One who is revealed in the 66 books of the Bible." And I would say, "Good, you're getting it. That's right." This is a call out of the world, out of worldly thinking, out of worldly desires and into the realm of God and his truth and Christ and his love, the gospel, matters of eternal significance rather than just squandering the mind that God has given us thinking about lowly, earthly, carnal things and never devoting our mind to God-honoring thoughts. Yeah, that's what we're saying. It's that stark. That's what scripture is saying.

And so I'm not going to, just so you know, I'm not going to follow this up with a survey of what the last five books are that you've read. I'm not going there. I'm content to lay out the meaning and the significance of scripture and let you humbly respond under the influence of the Holy Spirit on your own, and decide what it is, what kind of life that you want to live. Some of you guys, you're in your 70's. You know, you don't have much time left. If you squandered the prior 69 years of your life in ungodly thinking or not really giving yourself over seriously to God's truth, well, that's sad that there's been a waste like that but doesn't it simply just make it all the more urgent to give yourself over to these things now? Doesn't the shortness of time compel a greater, more urgent response? Say, "I've gotta get to it! I've wasted so much time." And to recognize that there is, you know, there is grace to be found in Christ and that he's more than happy to greatly bless the limited time you have left as a measure of his grace and mercy to unworthy sinners like all of us. And for you young people, what can I say except that you have the opportunity to set the course of your heart now in response to this text and say, "You know, whatever my parents have done, whatever my friends are doing, I'm going to set my mind, my heart, on these things. I'm going to give my mind over to Christ come what may." And you just set that foundational conviction in your mind. You know, it would be a worthy point of reflection for you to ask yourself, you know, what are the last five books that I've read? You know, what are the last five shows that I watched or whatever? Because that is an indication of where you are at and the current that is taking your mind, the drift of your mind. I'll leave it there. These are the things on which we are to think.

Now going back to verse 8. He changes the structure, the grammatical structure but he's still making the same basic point. He goes away from the word "whatever" and makes two conditional statements, "if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things." He's kind of summarizing it. Set your mind on high and lofty things. For it to be worthy of praise, we're seeking the approval of God. What would God be pleased that we are thinking about? And so here's what we do, we contemplate the full scope of all of these adjectives that he's given to us, we consider the whole spectrum of that lofty realm of thought, and we dwell on these things. That's the command here. These things, these things, these things, consider them and do this, dwell on them. And ultimately it comes down to this. As a pattern of life, again I'm not talking about specific individual books, I'm not stuck in the mud on that level of detail. We're talking about something far more important, far-reaching and foundational here. As a pattern of life, what God's word calls you to, what the Spirit of God through his word is calling to you even now is this: as a pattern of life, you are to reckon positive judgments on these things and say, "Yes, these things are good. These things about Christ are lofty. They are true. They are honorable. They are worth setting my heart aspirations after." And you settle

that as a conviction in your mind. "Not only is it worthy, that is what I will pursue with all of my life. I'm going to give myself to that and I'm going to use whatever sphere of influence that the Lord gives me, I'm going to use my sphere of influence to call others to that as well." And you reckon and you say, "That is good and that is my heart aspiration and I am not going to give myself over to things that contradict that, that are unworthy of that, that draw me away from that."

Look, let's make this as vertically personal as we can. Is Christ the eternal Son of God or not? Did he come to seek and to save the lost or not? Did he, in love, voluntarily give himself on the cross to pay for the sins of his people or not? Did he suffer for us or not? Was he put into the tomb or not? Was he raised from the dead or not? Is he ascended at the right hand of the Father and interceding for us or not? Is he coming again to intervene in world history and establish his kingdom or not? Is he going to usher in an eternity that excludes many who rejected him and eternally bless his own or not? If these things are true, beloved, they should be lovely in your eyes and there should be a sense in which you say to yourself, "There are no better things that I could think about than that. This is worth giving myself over to." And perhaps you're here and you're not a Christian, this is an opportunity to recognize that the Spirit is calling you to come out of your prior way of life and to give yourself over to Christ. "Lord, I want to repent of my sin. I want to leave this world behind. I want You. I completely submit and surrender all that I am in my body and in my mind, I submit it all to You. Take all of my sin, take it away. Take all that I am and make it whatever You want. I'm Yours. I surrender all, all to thee, my blessed Savior. I surrender all." I ask you, my friends, do you know something of that attitude in your heart? Have you come to Christ like that? These are the things to think.

Well, that leads us to our second point this morning: the things to do. The things to do and I'm just going to treat this very briefly for the sake of time. There is foundational thinking in the Christian life, that's for sure, but the Christian life is more than just a mental exercise, you could say. We saw that as we read Matthew 25 earlier. There is an element of outward conduct to follow. If the thinking is real, it will impact the way that you live. If faith is real, works will follow. Faith without works is dead. And so Paul joins these two together and he reminds his readers to follow his spiritual example and teaching.

Look at it there in verse 9. He says, "The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things." It's a present tense in the original language, meaning that this is to be the ongoing way that you approach life. "Everything that you've seen in my life," Paul says, "what you've learned from me, what you've watched me do, you do that also." He had personally modeled the very virtues from the prior verse in his own life. And so what the idea of the text is here, he's telling the Philippian readers, "Here's how you're to think." And someone might say, "Well, you know, how does that work itself out in practical day-to-day life?" And Paul says, "Look at my example. Look at what I've done. Look at how I've spent my life. Look at how I've suffered. This is what Christians do."

Let me remind you that he had said earlier in chapter 3, verse 17, look back there with me very quickly, chapter 3, verse 17, he says, "Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us." He says, "Consider my example and follow it." Paul had lived all of his life since the road to Damascus for the glory of Christ. What are we to do? We look at Paul and we see examples, we see illustrations that, "Do this." We look at that and by analogy we see how that might apply and work itself out in our own lives.

One writer said this and I quote, he said, "Both when Paul was with them and when he was away, the Philippians heard about his character and conduct." They saw his bravery. They saw how he faced trials. They saw his devotion. They heard his prayers. They saw his patient suffering. They saw his resiliency. Continuing the quote, "When Paul was with them, they saw his godly example and his modeling of the whatever's that he was asking of them. They had before their very eyes the pattern of an excellent and worthy life."

And as we said a few weeks ago out of Philippians 3, part of the reason that God has established the local church and why it is so important for you to be a consistent participant in the life of a local church, a biblical local church whether it's here or someplace else, this is not a recruiting video for Truth Community Church, it is so very vital for you to be a part of a local body that takes these things seriously so that you can be surrounded by examples young and old, and you can look and see, "Oh, this is how that person responded when the engine blew up in their face and they had third degree burns over half of their body. Oh, oh, this is how that woman responded when she lost her husband. This is how that man responded when he lost his job and he trusted Christ through it and he just patiently walked step-by-step. This is what a man with means who loves Christ, this is what he does with that." And you glean from all of those examples and a thousand more like them, and you say, "Oh," you start to put together, "this is how the Christian life is to be lived." And you say, "I see their example, now what do I do in my marriage? What do I do in my adversity? How do I give praise to God when my heart is overflowing with joy?" You don't figure that out on your own. You're not that smart. You're not that good at this. None of us are. None of us are.

And I don't mind telling you that a big part of my private reflection on ministry comes from as I face new situations in life and in ministry, I'm thinking so many times, I don't even recognize when I'm doing it anymore, "What would John do here? What did Chris Hamilton do in a similar situation?" And their examples proven by decades of faithfulness give me a reliable indication of where I am to go in my next step as I'm facing a decision that's important. I learn from them. I receive from them. I've heard it, I've seen it in them. I've seen the outcome of their ministry and that it's good and it's full of fruit so maybe I can follow and imitate them and get it right.

Thirdly, let me just go back, let me put the gear in reverse and just back up a little bit and take another look at it. You see, beloved, we're talking about an entire approach to life and the body of Christ is given by God to his people to help us in precisely this realm. Many others but precisely in this realm, and that's why it's so important, it's so important

for you to engage the body of Christ, to come in and develop relationships and if it doesn't happen right away, to persevere until it did. You know, we're not supposed to parachute in and then parachute out and just drop in, drop out, last one in, first one out. That's not Christian living. How are you ever going to find an example, a spiritual example if that's your approach to the body of Christ? And if you're not going to find it in the church, where are you going to find it? At the bar, bellying up for a beer with somebody else? Is that where you're going to find this kind of an example? Beloved, it's only going to be found in the realm of God's people and God's people are found in the local church. You're not going to find it online. You can't be a well-rounded disciple of Christ simply following what some self-appointed person with a keyboard is saying online. That's not it. You don't even know what's real about their lives. All you see is what they present to you. Well, in the local church, you know, we walk with each other over time, you know, you start to run out of places to hide. This is the real thing for better or for worse. All for your up-building, beloved. Our church is growing, I'm glad for that, I thank God for that. It's not that we need to pump up numbers here that I say these things. This is where we find how to do it.

Well, thirdly, finally, the peace of God. The presence of God, let's say. The pursuit of these duties of the things that you think and the things that you do, if I didn't make it clear, that was point 2, the things to do. Things to think, things to do. Point 3, the pursuit of these duties come with a promise and it's point 3, the peace of God. Look at it there at the end of verse 9. Things you've learned, received, heard, seen in me, practice these things, live this way, don't just praise it from a distance, "and the God of peace will be with you." The gospel is good news about peace. Christ is our peace it says in Ephesians 2. In justification we have peace with God. We are declared righteous and we are fully accepted by a holy God for the sake of his Son. He pardons all of our sin and accepts us as righteous so that there is an objective peace with him. We fear not his judgment because Christ suffered that judgment on our behalf. Christ is our peace. We have peace with God and God gives us inner peace in the midst of adversity. All of this peace filling the room like sweet perfume, like a sweet incense. Christ lovely, good, our peace. Justified before him. No fear of death. No fear of condemnation because there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. And all of the fear is gone and in the midst of adversity, in the midst of an uncertain world, an inner tranquility, confidence, peace, harmony, well-being, knowing that God himself is directing everything that is happening, and if I belong to him, then it's going to be well with me in the end. There's a reason we say, "It's well with my soul, no matter my lot, you have taught me say, It is well, it is well with my soul."

Why wouldn't you just look at these promises, look at the greatness of Christ, look at all of the benefits of what it means to belong to him and run to him? I mean, apart from the truth of the matter, it's in your best interest. This is the only place of blessing. This is the only harbor in the storm. And the point of the text here is that our harmony of mind rests on this prior harmony with God. By faith we rest in Christ for our reconciliation with him. By faith we rest in his divine wisdom. By faith we rest in his divine care for us. And beloved, the outflow of all of these things that we've been emphasizing here this morning is this, is that his peace begins to sanctify your mind, it sanctifies your personality. It

strengthens you. It brings calm. It brings stability. When you belong to Christ and you think this way, when you belong to Christ and you do these things, the God of this peace is with you and there is this close intimacy of mind, and this assurance of heart that looks at the raging seas and says, "Do you know what? Christ can walk on that and if He bid me to do so, I could walk on it too because He's sovereign and He loves me and He keeps me and I'm under His protection."

So my friends, Christian peace doesn't just happen. There's a pursuit that takes place. For those of you that are in the midst of that pursuit, God bless you. May he help and strengthen you to excel still more. For those of you that have been slowly frittering away your life and your time, I call you out of that and into what we've seen in God's word here today. Peace doesn't just happen, it is produced by Christian thinking and conduct.

Let's pray.

Father, help us to dwell on these things. Help us to practice these things and as we do, may You, the God of peace, be with us all. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Thanks for listening to Pastor Don Green from Truth Community Church in Cincinnati, Ohio. You can find church information, Don's complete sermon library and other helpful materials at thetruthpulpit.com. This message is copyrighted by Don Green. All rights reserved.