

The Comprehensive Call of Christ

Philippians 4:8-9

Introduction

The book of Philippians places a significant emphasis on the Lordship of Christ. What this means is that when the apostle Paul speaks of Jesus Christ, he often highlights and draws out implications from the fact that Jesus is Lord over all. The clearest example of this emphasis is in Philippians 2:5:11, which states,

⁵ In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

⁶ Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;
⁷ rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.
⁸ And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!
⁹ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
¹¹ and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

While that passage begins with a consideration of the example of how Christ's service in his humiliation during his incarnation is a pattern for our own Christian service, Paul reminds us of Christ's now exalted state as Lord to the glory of God the Father. Thus, when we consider Christ's call on our lives as Christians, we must see that it is grounded in the reality of Christ's authority over us. Jesus does not ask us for permission to rule over our lives. Jesus has already received the name that is above every name, He is Lord. He is King. He rules and reigns over His people for their good and God's glory. And as Jesus rules and reigns over us as Lord, he issues a comprehensive call over us.

As we will see this morning, Christ's call over us does not leave any aspect of our lives excluded. If Jesus would be the Lord of our lives, then He must be Lord over everything, which is what we will briefly consider this morning from Philippians 4:8-9...

Philippians 4:8-9

⁸ Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. ⁹ Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

Exposition

The content of these verses is familiar and rather simple, yet still very profound.

Through the apostle Paul, Christ calls us to...

I. Think (V. 8)

To state it another way, as Lord over us, for our good and His glory, Christ cares about our thoughts. He cares about the way we think and what we think about. He calls us to “dwell on” the right things. So, let’s look at the six things that Paul calls his audience to think about or dwell on:

- Whatever is “True” – That which accords with God’s Truth
- Whatever is “Noble” – That which is worthy of honor
- Whatever is “Right” – That which promotes and demonstrates God’s righteousness
- Whatever is “Pure” – That which is pure and unstained by sin
- Whatever is “Lovely” – That which reflects the beauty of God’s glory
- Whatever is “Admirable” – That which is worthy of promotion

Paul summarizes all six of these areas by saying “if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.” As you can tell, Paul’s instruction issues a comprehensive call on our lives under the Lordship of Christ to meditate on, think about, dwell on the “excellent and praiseworthy things.” And we are to do so with an awareness of Christ and his glory in all of these aspects.

In other words, there is a way that Christians are to think in relationship to Christ, even when it comes to things that are not unique to the Christian community. So, for example, maybe you like classical music or jazz music. Many times such music is often instrumental, not containing explicit lyrics. So, you come to a passage like Philippians 4:8, you hear that you are to “dwell on” things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, and admirable. You instructed to think things that are “excellent and praiseworthy.” How do you do that with instrumental classical music or jazz music?

Well, let's think about it for a moment. What is music? To borrow the Oxford definition, "Music is vocal or instrumental sounds (or both) combined in such a way as to produce beauty of form, harmony, and expression of emotion." In other words, there is an order and an intention to music that is recognizable. You typically know when you are hearing music and when you are just hearing noise. So, we come to Philippians 4:8, we see that we are told to reflect upon that which is "excellent and praiseworthy," so, while we are listening to a classical musician like Yo-Yo Ma, play Bach's Cello Suite No. 1 in G major, while we are enjoying the sounds that have been combined to produce "beauty of form, harmony, and expression of emotion," we ought also to be thinking about how such beauty, harmony, and expression points us to the great beauty and glory of the God who makes such a thing possible! We can (and we ought to) dwell on and think deeply of the creative majesty of our God in this world.

Beauty is God's idea, and it can be found in all areas of our life. Truth is God's idea, and it is reflected in all areas of our life. And the same goes for things that are noble, right, pure, and admirable.

I know that we do not typically get in our vehicles and each day, start the car and sit there in wonder for a few moments and say, "Wow! Can you believe it? A series of controlled, powerful explosions are occurring just a few feet from us in that engine, and, as a result of the precise engineer, that depends upon a world that is ordered according to truth (that which corresponds to reality), we are able to travel long distances in short periods of time to see loved ones and go on trips and transport our families. No, we get in our vehicles, and because we are so accustomed to things happen a certain way, we do not think anything of the rather amazing thing that is happening before us, and it is happening because God has so created and ordered our world, that such things are even possible. And don't even get me started about the wonder of air travel!

Now, why have I mentioned these examples of everyday occurrences? It is because we do have to go looking far for examples of God's truth, beauty, nobility, righteousness, and purity in our everyday lives. As Psalm 19 would tell us, "Day after Day pours for speech, and Night after Night reveals knowledge" about the glory of God. The problem for us is not lack of access to the wonders that God is doing and maintaining before us, but rather, we have grown cold to his glory. We have become apathetic in our thinking in all these areas.

And I believe that one of the root causes to our apathy in our thinking in all these areas that Paul mentions is because we have not given the attention to God's Word like we should, otherwise, we would see God's glory with greater clarity in the everyday aspects of our life, and then be able to obey the instruction of Philippians 4:8 regarding the need to dwell on the "praiseworthy, morally excellent," God-glorifying things that God has graciously allowed us to enjoy and experience on a regular basis. If we are going to think rightly about that which is truth, noble, right, pure, and admirable, then we must be spending sufficient time with God in His Word that we might have these categories rightly defined.

As we meditate on God's truth, we will grow in our ability to recognize truth and dwell on it. As we reflect on God's honor, we will be able to discern between what is honorable and what is dishonorable in the world, and thus rightly "think about those things." When we behold God's righteousness, we will be both offended by injustice in the world and concerned about seeing God's righteousness reflected in the world, thus stirring us to "dwell on" that which is honorable. As we consider the purity and holiness of God, we will more clearly see the sin and rebellion in our society and long for the day when all sin will be dealt with by Christ, while also being able to enjoy the glimpses and experiences of purity that God has preserved for us by His grace, thus granting us the opportunity to think more deeply about it. When we grow in our admiration for God as He has revealed Himself to be, we will also grow in our capacity to discern what is admirable in this world, and what is contrary to God's glory. The closer we get to God and see these virtues in Him, the greater chance we will have to see and discern these virtues in our world, and dwell on them.

Yet, as it is, we struggle to see and think about and dwell on the glory of God in the seemingly common things of our day-to-day life, and I believe this tends to be this because we have often failed to meditate rightly on how such virtues are perfectly reflected in the image of God, Jesus Christ.

If we are going to think rightly and deeply about the world that we inhabit, and enjoy it in the way that God intends, then we must begin by thinking rightly and deeply about the God who created it and sustains it in order that we might dwell on it in a manner that glorifies Him and does us much good. And then, as we have thought deeply about who God is, we must take care to act according to what He has revealed to us in His Word, which leads us to verse 9...

II. Act (V. 9a)

In verse 8, we saw that Christ cares about the way we think. Now, in verse 9, we see that Christ also cares about how we act. In verse 9, Paul directs his readers' attention to his own teaching and example. He says, "Do what you have learned, received, heard, and seen in me. If you do these things, then the peace of God will be with you."

This command "to follow" Paul's life and teaching is nothing new. We have already seen Paul instructing the church in Philippi to this type of living in Philippians 3:17, where Paul writes, "Join in imitating me, brothers, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us." If you recall that context, then you remember that the example that Paul set was one of a ruthless pursuit of knowing Jesus Christ no matter the cost. Of course, all of this goes back to Paul central message from Philippians 1:27, which reads, "Live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ." What we find then in verse 9 is a concluding exhortation to the Philippian Christians to live lives that are worthy of the Gospel. Lives that dwell upon the things that direct them to the glory of Christ. Lives that will accord with Paul's teaching and example, which is ultimately rooted in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Time would fail me to adequately summarize all that Paul has taught and exemplified to the church in Philippi. If you want a fuller picture of what I'm going to say, I would encourage to go back and read through the entire book of Philippians. In brief, though, Paul thanked the church for their partnership in the gospel, explained how he was grateful that the gospel was being preached, called them to live lives worthy of the gospel, and taught them to follow the example of Christ even if it meant suffering (as Paul was imprisoned at the time of the writing of the letter for his gospel ministry).

Christ is worthy of our complete, unwavering, full obedience. We are his servants. He is our Lord and Master. We do as He pleased for His purpose. And, in God's merciful kindness, this is the existence that is full of the greatest joy and satisfaction that this world has every known. We obey Christ regardless of the consequences in this world. Because we love Him, we listen to Him. We do what He says because He intends good for us and glory for Himself in everything that He calls us to.

But, if we are honest, at times, such a call for complete obedience, is scary. Full obedience? What if I lose my job? What if I lose my friends? What if I lose my life, even? Surely God would not want those things to happen to me. Surely He would not call me to such a life?

Right? How can anyone ever live like this? Paul's answer to our question comes at the end of verse 9...

III. Know (V. 9b)

The only hope for us to think and act in accordance with what we find in these verse is that we “know that the God of peace will be with us!”

Not only does Christ care about our thoughts and actions, but Christ also cares that we know His promises. That we know that the God of peace will be with as we seek to think and act in a manner worthy of the Gospel. The promise comes before any performance on our part. The promise of the presence of the God of peace is not contingent upon how well we obey these commands to think and act. Instead, our only hope to be able to think and act in accordance with these commands is for the God of peace to be with us. Apart from his empowering presence, we can do nothing. But where God is present, we can do all things through Him, which is what Paul testifies to in him own life just a few verses later in Philippians 4.

Conclusion

If we would live lives that conform to Christ's comprehensive call, we must know our need for the God of peace to be with us. To hear the promise that “He will never leave us nor forsake us.”

The aim of Paul's closing exhortations here in Philippians 4 is not to weigh the Christian down with burden, but to enrich their experience and deepen their understanding of God's great grace and mercy to them in Christ Jesus. The comprehensive call of Christ on our lives is one aimed at our flourishing and hope in this world. It is aimed at stirring our affections for the One who laid His life down in our place.

Have you submitted your life to the one who has issues this call as Savior and Lord?