

## Knowing Christ, The Heart And Soul Of Faith

### 9. Christ Around Us

Philippians 4:8-9

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#### **What's on your mind?**

What's on your mind? It's one of those everyday questions we ask one another, like "How're you doing?" or "What's happening?" Only when we're asked, "What's on your mind?" it can catch you a little off guard. It alerts you that there ARE things on your mind. And those things are impacting what's on your heart and maybe even what's happening in your body right now.

#### **"Finally..."**

This is the subject of the message this morning. And it comes to us at this point in our journey through this wonderful book of Philippians. Please take your Bibles and turn to Philippians 4:8-9. When you find that passage you'll notice that verse 8 begins with "Finally my brothers."

Now this is the *second* "finally" in Philippians. It reminds me of some preachers! Finally, doesn't always mean the sermon is ending! Well, this "finally" is for real here in Philippians 4:8! And it's interesting where Paul goes with his final "finally" here. Let's read Philippians 4:8-9 together in unison.

*<sup>8</sup>Finally, brothers, 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. <sup>9</sup>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.*

#### **PRAYER**

Gracious God, our heavenly Father, these are incredibly clear, potentially powerful words. They speak directly to liberating ours from the clutter focusing our minds on the noble, the right, the pure, the lovely, the admirable, the excellent and the praiseworthy. We pray that your glory all around us in the noble, the pure, the lovely, the admirable, the excellent and the praiseworthy may shine into our lives and through our lives into our world because our minds are more and more focused on these things. And *especially*...focused on Jesus, our Savior, our Lord, our Friend. For we pray in his strong name, Amen

#### **Knowing Christ, the heart and soul of faith**

From the very beginning of this letter to the Philippians, Paul's focus is knowing Christ. In chapter 1, verses 9-11 Paul says, *<sup>9</sup>And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, <sup>10</sup>so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, <sup>11</sup>filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.*

Then in chapter 3:7-9, in what I consider to be the very heart of this epistle and therefore the heart of this series of message we read these words: *<sup>7</sup>But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. <sup>8</sup>What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ <sup>9</sup>and be found in him...*

### **Knowing Christ ....**

Knowing Christ is the heart and soul of faith! Knowing Christ is the secret of the Christian life! Knowing Christ is the reason Christ came. Knowing Christ is the key to moving beyond a religion of feelings or a kind of undefined spirituality that is so dependent on what's happening around you.

Knowing Christ means Christ spiritually coming to live within me. What does that mean...Christ *living with in me?* In Ephesians 3:16-7 Paul uses the term "dwell."<sup>16</sup> *I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being,* <sup>17</sup>*so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.*

The Christian life doesn't really come alive for you until Christ comes to *dwell within you*. This is not something that just happens. Christ comes to dwell within you when you open the door by faith and invite Him in.

### **Receiving Christ, the beginning of faith**

In Revelation 3:20 we encounter a beautiful picture of what this looks and feels like. <sup>20</sup>"*Here I am!*" Jesus speaks to our inner soul, to that place we pick up the music and prompting of God's sweet Holy Spirit, "*Here I am, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.*"

If you've never let him in, or if he's been dispatched outside your life for a while, He's knocking on your heart's door today. Only you can let Him in. He won't force the door. He might try the lock...but He won't barge in. Like the side gate in many of our homes, the latch is on the inside. He'd love to reach over the top and unhook it, but He let's you do that. In fact He set it up that way. We're free to choose. Only you can open the door of your own heart to Him.

### **You can open the door!**

You can open that door...in a heartbeat with just the faint whisper of a prayer. "Jesus, come into my life." Jesus, let's sit down and talk. First of all let me say that I need you. Probably more than I know. I also need to tell you that there are a lot of things in my life and in this world I don't understand. I have a feeling you can't explain it all to me over one cup of coffee...but if I let you live here—in my soul—we can have a whole lifetime to talk about it. Because I have a feeling I'm going to need You as my life unfolds from one season to another. In fact I need You right now! Come on in, sit down and stay!"

### **Jesus, our personal coach**

When Jesus comes into our hearts to dwell by faith, He becomes not only our Savior, He becomes our personal coach. And if we let Him play that role and begin to do what He says, He becomes more and more our Lord. I would like you now to imagine Jesus sitting at your kitchen table, and talking to you, *coaching* you on the role of our minds in your faith. I can imagine His input going something like this.

"You know your mind plays a big part in your faith and your experience of God. You've heard the expression 'garbage in, garbage out?'" Well that's not just a phrase. It's true! What you think about, what you allow your mind to dwell on, what you let your mind take in, is going to have an effect on you."

"Now, let me try to explain what I mean here. You now have some of the most powerful communication tools ever invented. I can't even imagine what Stephen Jobs is going to come up with next. Actually I can; I'm God, I can see it...but I won't divulge it to you now. It'd blow your mind! Besides, you already have enough trouble with movies. You know, I wasn't particularly thrilled with that phrase, "Frankly, Scarlett I don't give a damn!" Some people say that was a big turning point in Hollywood. But after seeing how she treated him throughout "Gone with the Wind" I could certainly understand why he'd say that! But that's small stuff! Do you have any idea how powerful and sophisticated that medium has become? Do you realize that people will sit still for a two hour movie, but have trouble making it through a 25 minute sermon?"

“That’s why you ought to seriously consider using this communication tool in church. It’ll bother some people, but if you use it to depict the gospel and teach my Word, and if you use it to help your mind think about whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, or excellent or praiseworthy—like for example a short clip of what God is doing with Kids Alive in the Dominican Republic, then great. By all means, use it.

“But let me tell you what I’m most concerned about. And that brings us back to your Macintosh—which by the way I think is the coolest system. But of course, I try not to play favorites! Here’s what I want to say about your computer: “Be careful how you use it. I’m not just talking about the on-line pornography. That’s a serious issue. VERY serious. And you have to take steps and use stubborn discipline to keep away from it. By the way, I know people think that’s ALL I care about! Not true!

“What I’m concerned about is that what you let your mind focus on tends to stay there. Let me illustrate what I mean. There are some older people in church today. Let me say a phrase and I’ll bet they can complete it...here goes: “Maxwell House Coffee, it’s...(good to the last drop).” Here’s a hard one: “You can trust your car to...(the man who wears a star).” Here’s one probably everyone over 21 knows: “Plop. Plop, Fizz, fizz...(O what a relief it is!)” You see? Once something gets into your mind, it tends to stay there...for a long time. It even becomes a part of you, like your parents’ phone number, or your first locker combination! Now let’s try another one: “If God is for us...(who can be against us) Great! I’m so glad you have that embedded in your mind. There are a lot of other things you want to have embedded there, but that’s enough for now. I think you get my point! People have repeated this sequence, because it’s true: *Sow a thought, reap an action, Sow an action, reap a habit, Sow a habit, reap a character, Sow a character, reap a destiny.*

“That’s why Proverbs 4:23 says, “*Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.*” Note that word “guard!” It means you have to be on guard, like a spam blocker on your computer. Guard the *entry* to your heart, which includes your mind. The more spam you block, which is all that information streaming 24-7 into your mind over the internet, on film, in books, in movies, in music, in the myriad of things coming to you these days, the less you’ll have to clean out later. Guard your mind, guard your heart. It’s the very wellspring of your life! Now that’s all for today. We need to begin wrapping this up...so I’ll turn it back to Pastor Jim. ‘Hey Pastor Jim, remember now, the key word for you at this point is...ah “finally!” OK, Lord! I suggest that in wrapping this up we first of all say again out loud the words of Philippians 4:8-9. If repetition is the mother of learning, it’ll help install these words in our minds:

#### **Philippians 4:8-9**

<sup>8</sup>*Finally, brothers, 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.* <sup>9</sup>*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.*

Next, let’s turn to Romans 12:1-2 and say *those* words aloud together, for the same reason, to let them enter and find a permanent home in our minds:

#### **Romans 12:1-2**

<sup>1</sup>*Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.* <sup>2</sup>*Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

Finally, let’s turn to Psalm 1 and read that aloud together. These words can help you when the flotsam and jetsam of the world comes floating into your minds, and you are far away from church, from your small group, you’re in a hotel room away from home after a busy day of work ion a far away city. God’s Word can literally coach you through the temptation or the just plain weariness of your weak humanity.

## Psalm 1

<sup>1</sup> *Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked  
or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers.*

<sup>2</sup> *But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.*

<sup>3</sup> *He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither.  
Whatever he does prospers.*

<sup>4</sup> *Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away.*

<sup>5</sup> *Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.*

<sup>6</sup> *For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.*

### Godliness in; godliness out

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God! Garbage in; garbage out. It's true! But so is the reverse: "godliness in, godliness out!" It's a matter of not only knowing Christ, but letting your mind dwell on Him. And when you do that, you begin to notice some changes. You'll begin to notice, even feel again the sheer wonder of life. You'll appreciate even more the beauty of nature. With that garbage out of your mind, and godliness in your mind, you'll feel again the delight of people, like your family, you hold so dear. Church will not become so much of a stretch for you. And your uncluttered mind can see Jesus more clearly, which is what He wants; and what you want as well!

Our closing song today calls us to praise God and to focus our minds on what is noble, what is right, what is pure, what is lovely, what is admirable, what is excellent, what is praiseworthy. Let's rise to sing, and let's allow this hymn to help us rise to the right focus and renewal of our minds:

### For the Beauty of the Earth

*For the beauty of the earth, for the glory of the skies,  
for the love which from our birth over and around us lies;  
Lord of all, to thee we raise this our hymn of grateful praise.*

*For the beauty of each hour of the day and of the night,  
hill and vale, and tree and flower, sun and moon, and stars of light;  
Lord of all, to thee we raise this our hymn of grateful praise.*

*For the joy of ear and eye, for the heart and mind's delight,  
for the mystic harmony, linking sense to sound and sight;  
Lord of all, to thee we raise this our hymn of grateful praise.*

*For the joy of human love, brother, sister, parent, child,  
friends on earth and friends above, for all gentle thoughts and mild;  
Lord of all, to thee we raise this our hymn of grateful praise.*

*For thy church, that evermore lifteth holy hands above,  
offering up on every shore her pure sacrifice of love;  
Lord of all, to thee we raise this our hymn of grateful praise.*

*For thyself, best Gift Divine, to the world so freely given,  
for that great, great love of thine, peace on earth, and joy in heaven:  
Lord of all, to thee we raise this our hymn of grateful praise.*

Folliot S. Pierpoint

