

## Philippians 4:1-9

### Rising to the Example of Paul

*Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do – v.9*

Verses 8,9 show a very strong connection between thinking and doing. *Think on these things* Paul writes in v. 8 making reference to whatsoever things are true and honest and just and pure and lovely and of good report. Now in v. 9 there is another reference to *things. Those things which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do.* Here now in v. 9 the focus shifts from thinking to doing. And so you see the close proximity between thinking and doing.

Last week I made the point that Christianity is a thinking religion. And this sets it apart from the many false religions that call for blind loyalty and allegiance, a sort of mindless compliance to the dictates of false religion that are simply given to the followers of those religions. That kind of religion is spiritual bondage. Biblical Christianity was never meant to function that way and where Christianity does function that way you can be sure that that segment of Christianity has lost its way.

By affirming the individual priesthood of the believer, Protestantism affirms the freedom of the believer to read the Bible and to search the Scriptures, like those Christians at Berea who searched the Scriptures whether the things the Apostle Paul was teaching were so. You should make Acts 17:11 your motto which says *These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.*

So we are happy to affirm that the Christian should be characterized as a man who thinks. He is engaged in thinking and as v. 8 teaches us he is guided in his thinking, focusing on the vast amount of things that are true and honest etc. And the Christian is also guarded in this thinking. There is no place for harboring thoughts that are impure and not based on truth that lead to sins of the heart and if left unchecked will also lead to sins of the flesh.

Now like I said, in v. 9 the focus shifts from thinking to doing. Just as Christianity is to be a thinking religion it's also to be a practical religion – i.e. it's a religion that practices what it believes, or practices what it thinks. Unfortunately there is a tendency among some Christians, and perhaps more so among some Reformed Christians to view their religion as an intellectual religion but not so much as a practical religion. This has been the kind of reproach that some, even many Reformed Christians bear in the world.

Oh, they pride themselves in their theology. They have read their Bibles and they've read their Confessional statements and many of them love to read the Reformers and the Puritans and they've built their libraries and I've seen libraries of laymen that are Reformed in their outlook and those libraries are quite impressive and could rival the libraries of many of a minister. And that's well and good as far as it goes.

But when that same Christian who can throw out names like John Owen and John Flavel and Thomas Goodwin but that Christian's life can hardly be distinguished from those in the world around him then something has not gone right. And I think if we're honest we have to acknowledge that Reformed Christianity takes on the appearance of those philosophers at Athens that Paul addressed in the midst of Mars hill (Acts 17:22). Oh the topics of discussion are different. We are not engaged in the discussion of Greek philosophy, we're engaged in discussions of Reformed Theology.

But cannot the same thing be said of many in Reformed circles that is said of those Greek philosophers in Acts 17:21 *For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing*. They were devoted to being intellectual but they were not devoted to being practical. Their knowledge didn't do them any good, in other words. Life itself became just so much speculating or discussing and debating some philosophical notion.

Bible based Christianity is to be a thinking religion but it's also to be a practical religion and the thing we must guard ourselves against is the temptation to stress one over the other. There are those that love theology and stress theology but then again there are others that have no particular love for theology but love the practical aspects of religion. I've been around long enough to see both ends of such a spectrum and to see tendencies to stress one to the exclusion of the other. That's why I think it's a point worth making that in vv. 8,9 of Phil. 4 we see that Christianity engages the mind and the heart but also addresses the actions of the Christian.

And so Paul says in v. 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*. The word *do* means literally to exercise, to practice, to be busy with, or to carry on. The tense of the word is a present active imperative which means it carries the force of a command that is to be continually heeded. Be doing these things continually is what Paul's words mean.

Now there is something else quite remarkable in this text which on the surface could convey a misimpression about the Apostle Paul. Do you notice how he is setting himself forth as the example for the Philippians to follow. *Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do*. Doesn't that seem at first to be a little bit arrogant? Doesn't that fly in the face of the humility that Paul has emphasized earlier in this epistle?

How many of us would be so bold as to say to others – be like me. And when you hear someone saying *be like me* don't you find something within you that says *who are you?* And don't you find a natural resistance to being like the person that is calling for others to be like him? I suggest to you that this is a misimpression that exists on the surface of the text and that when the text is rightly understood you will come to realize that there are many ways within your various relationships in which you should call on others to be like you.

And so these words of Paul present a challenge to the believer. There's a challenge to follow a good example and there's a challenge to become a good example that would lead others to follow that example. I want to approach the text today from the perspective of the challenge that it presents. I've entitled the message this morning:

## Rising to the Challenge of an Apostolic Example

### I. The Means for Rising to the Challenge

To understand the challenge before us we have to understand something of the great Apostle himself. Let me begin, therefore, by saying that Paul did not consider himself to be perfect or sinless. In Romans 7 you find Paul making the honest admission that the battle between the flesh and spirit led him at times to say *O wretched man that I am. Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?* And earlier in this epistle to the Philippians we find him admitting - *Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect* (3:12); *Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended* (3:13). So Paul did not put himself forward as one who was perfect or as one who had arrived so to speak.

You might be tempted to ask why Paul would call attention to himself rather than point the Philippians to Christ. Shouldn't Christ be the example we follow? Indeed didn't Paul earlier say to the Philippians *Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus*. Christ is obviously our ultimate example but wouldn't you agree that we also need an example of what it means to walk by faith in Christ? That's how Paul sets forth himself, not as one who is perfect or one who has arrived but as one who most definitely believed in Christ.

And that's an example we want to follow and that's the kind of example we want to set forth – the example of a follower of Christ. As a follower of Christ, you see, Paul could say to the Romans *I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ* (Rom. 1:16). Have you ever thought about that statement in Romans? Paul was writing to Christians, to Christians who had already established a reputation for their faith. Why would Paul find it necessary to say to such Christians that he was not ashamed of the gospel of Christ unless he recognized that there are times when many Christians act as if they are ashamed of Christ?

Here is a good way to follow Paul's example, then – don't ever, under any circumstances be ashamed of Christ. You will be tempted to be ashamed of him. You will be regarded as a member of the "flat earth" society for believing in the Bible. You will be deemed as unintellectual, unscientific, one who embraces an old fashioned morality that is outdated and some people's eyes bigoted and prejudiced toward others.

A serious warning is communicated by Christ himself in this respect. Lu 9:26 *For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and [in his] Father's, and of the holy angels*. We find Paul also giving the admonition to Timothy in 2Ti 1:8 *Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God*.

There's no use denying that there is reproach to being a Christian. So long as the doctrine of Christ crucified is to the Jews a stumblingblock and the Greeks foolishness there will always be a certain stigma to being a Christian. Paul was never ashamed of the gospel of Christ, let's make sure that we're never shamed of it either.

Now if we're going to follow the example of Paul as a follower of Christ then we will also have to make sure that we maintain a victorious outlook in this world. You remember the study we did quite some time ago now from 1:12? *But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things [which happened] unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel.* The word to highlight in that verse in the word *rather*.

That's a word of contrast. Contrary to the way things might look, Paul is saying. In spite of the fact that my ministry has been restrained by my imprisonment the truth remains that the gospel is being furthered. Far from restraining the gospel the things that have fallen out to me are actually advancing the gospel. Oh that we as Christians might establish and maintain that outlook.

It is true, you know. The gospel is advancing. You might not think so when you see the forces of ungodliness all around you. When you see a government that seems to be increasingly hostile to all that is godly and right you might be tempted to think, as the Philippians were tempted to think, that the gospel is in retreat. But that's why we must see above and beyond the things of this world. You must see Christ seated on his throne, all power and authority being given to him. You must be ruled by the good report of God's word rather than the propaganda of this present evil world.

Stay informed of what's being reported in the world but don't be dominated by those reports. Be dominated instead by a better and more trustworthy report which is the report of Christ's resurrection and ascension into heaven. Paul was so aware of heaven and so aware of spiritual reality and so aware of Christ himself that he could say *For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. 22 But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not. 23 For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better.*

Rising to the challenge of Apostolic Example, then, is rising to the challenge of establishing and maintaining an optimistic outlook no matter how bleak the things in this world appear. Let me say also regarding the challenge of Paul's example that if we would rise to emulate his example then we must press on to know Christ.

Phil. 3:7,8 *But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. 8 Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ.*

Too many Christians fall off from Paul's example in this regard. They become complacent in their knowledge of Christ. They too easily accept their current level of knowledge and experience and mistakenly think that there's no more to be known. There's no more spiritual growth to be obtained. There's no further advancement in sanctification.

I'm as holy as I'm going to get. And while I know I could be better I also know I'm not as bad as I once was. Let's be honest with ourselves this morning people. If you find yourself reasoning the way I've just now described be honest enough to admit that you want no more of Christ and you want no more growth in grace and your desire for holiness has waned. It's not that there's no more room for growth in grace; the honest truth is that you have no further desire for advancement in your walk with the Lord.

I'm afraid that this kind of complacency is common because we live in a world that affords us so much luxury and ease. Oh we hear on a daily basis how the standard of living in America is falling. We may not be able to pass on to our children the American Dream of having a large house and multiple cars and high definition big screen televisions. However much the standard of living may be falling it hasn't fallen far enough if you've become complacent toward your spiritual pursuits. It may have to fall much further and cost us much more before we'll decide that maybe we ought to be seeking more of Christ. If that's the case then I say let it fall, let the bottom drop out of the economy if that's what it takes for the bottom to drop out of our worldliness. Maybe then we'll rise to the challenge of setting our affections on things above.

So if we're to rise to this challenge of Apostolic example then we must understand what the challenge entails or encompasses. It compasses being bold for Christ; it encompasses an optimistic outlook and it encompasses a pressing forward to know him whom to know is everlasting life. Paul states the matter very succinctly in our text as to how we rise the challenge of Apostolic example.

Notice what he says: *Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do.* What had the Philippians learned and received and heard and seen in Paul? Simply put they learned of Christ; they received Christ; They heard about and received by faith the righteousness of Christ. They learned about the atoning death of Christ; they received the gospel of Christ and gained the assurance of eternal life. They saw in Paul one who could rejoice in Christ, one who lived for Christ, one who knew in the depth of his soul the reality of heaven to such a degree that it was his first choice to depart from this world to be with Christ.

These are the things we have learned and received and heard. I trust, then, that you'll rise to the challenge of doing the things you have learned and received and heard and seen. Doing these things means appropriating them by faith. Faith, you see, is believing but it's believing which leads to doing. So these are the means for rising to the challenge. Would you consider next:

## II. The Need for Rising to the Challenge

*Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do,* Paul says in our text. These words indicate to us that Paul communicated to the Philippians in a number of ways. They heard things from Paul, which means that he verbally communicated some things to them. And they learned things from Paul which means that he would have taught them certain things. And they received things from Paul which

indicates that Paul convinced them of the things he taught them in such a way that they appropriated those things by faith. And then they saw things in Paul which means that Paul demonstrated to them what he communicated and taught them.

The point I now wish to make is that we must not only strive to follow Paul's Apostolic example but we must also be Apostolic examples to others. And the applications for this point can be made on a number of levels. Church leaders, elders, or ministers, want their congregants to follow after Christ. How is that to be accomplished?

It must be accomplished by those leaders or by that Pastor communicating, teaching, and demonstrating the truths of the gospel. There is a text in Hebrews that smites me with conviction each time I read it, a text that magnifies my need for grace and my need for the Holy Spirit and my obligation and responsibility to rise to the precept it sets forth. The text is not addressed to Pastors directly. It's addressed to those that under the rule of the Pastor or the elders. Listen to the words of Heb 13:7 *Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of [their] conversation.*

*Whose faith follow* – doesn't that present the challenge to leaders to demonstrate their faith? Shouldn't that challenge leaders in churches to never allow complacency in the matter of their faith? Shouldn't our faith be an active faith, rather than a dead faith? Shouldn't such faith lead us to prayer and to activity for Christ?

But like I said, the application can be made in a number of ways. Parents, don't you find such a statement convicting? Oh I hope you are engaged in communicating and teaching your children so that you can say to them *the things you have learned and received and heard do*. I know that parents take this part of the verse to heart. That's why you devote yourselves to homeschooling. You have the proper burden for your children to learn and receive and hear the truth of Christ and the gospel.

But notice that the Apostolic example of Paul includes the things that the Philippians had seen in him. *The things which ye have both learned and received and heard and seen in me do*. There's the rub – the things which you have seen in me do. I wonder how many parents would feel compelled to say to their children *the things you have seen in me don't do*. Oh, pay attention to the things I've communicated to you. Pay attention to the things you've been taught in the home and in church. But please pay no attention to the things you have seen in me. Make sure you don't do those things.

I listened to a sermon on this text in which the preacher drove this point home very forcefully and in his message pointed out that the reason so many children do not follow their parents is on account of what they did see and do see in those parents. And there is most definitely, then, a need for leaders in the church and for parents in the home to be communicators and demonstrators of the things that are communicated and taught.

Now I realize that it's possible for a church leader and for a parent to feel like he's walking on a tight rope. I can remember feeling this way as a young parent when I attended a church that placed a very strong emphasis on the family and on the duties of

parents to teach their children and for husbands to lead in their homes and for wives to submit to their husbands. I think I probably began feeling sorry for my children before they were old enough to walk because by that time I had been so beat up with a sense of my own shortcomings and inadequacies that I concluded that my children didn't have a chance in this world to go on with Christ.

Remember what I said earlier about Paul. He didn't set himself forward as an example of one who had arrived at sinless perfection, one who had total victory over the world and the flesh and the devil. Neither did he present himself as one who had arrived and knew of Christ all that was possible to know. I can't help but wonder if one of the contributing factors that could lead to children despising their parent's authority and rejecting their parents God would be this factor of those parents thinking that they have to posture themselves as those that are sinlessly perfect who never make mistakes.

I have to set a good example for my children, they reason, I want my children to do what they learn and hear and see in me, therefore, I must make them think I'm perfect and that I've arrived and that I'm infallible lest they stumble at my example. I know some Pastors posture themselves that way with their people. Parents with good intentions but with faulty reasoning can do likewise.

The way to check such a tendency is to ask yourself some simple and searching questions. What exactly have you learned? What exactly has been communicated to you that you've received? Has it ever been communicated or taught you that you will achieve perfection in your practice in this present evil world? Have you ever been taught that the time will come when you'll no longer be in need of grace or forgiveness? You know the answer. You know that the gospel says to you that you deceive yourself if you think you have no sin; and that same gospel says to you that *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

Here, then, is where faith becomes a demonstrated faith – not that we try to cloak our sin with a show of hypocrisy but that we instead walk humbly and honestly with God before our children or before others in general.

This is what leads to the benefit that is given in our text. Notice that when we seek to follow and demonstrate this Apostolic example v. 9 says at the end of the verse *and the God of peace shall be with you.* Here again I think it's easy to misconstrue the meaning of the text. Whenever you see a statement of “do this...and the benefit will be this” it's easy to treat the statement as if it's somehow converting the new covenant of grace back into the old covenant of works.

To the degree you succeed in modeling a perfect Apostolic example, to that same degree you'll know the presence of the God of peace. The statement must be understood in terms of the new covenant in which it's presented. Basically you can look at the statement and interpret it this way – when you walk by faith you'll know the presence of Christ who is our peace. That's what Apostolic example teaches us – to walk by faith – not a dead faith, mind you, not an empty or merely intellectual faith but a genuine faith that is active.

When you walk by that kind of faith the presence of the God of peace will be your portion. He'll be with you to correct you. He'll be with you to forgive you and he'll be with you to empower you to strive for the right things and in the right way. And in that striving that springs from that kind of faith you'll be following the Apostolic example and you'll be demonstrating that Apostolic example for others to follow.

*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. May we be those that think on the right things so that we may in turn be those that practice that right things.*