

FOUNDATION OF FAITH!
GOD THE FATHER
PART 11

This morning we are continuing our study on the Foundation of our Christian Faith and over the last several weeks we have been looking at God the Father. We have seen His natural and moral attributes and how they apply to our own lives. We have seen, in light of all that God is, in light of all that He has done, how we are to respond, how we are to live out our Christian faith.

This morning as we continue to look at the topic of God the Father, we are going to focus on drawing near to God. I am sure that most if not all of us have that desire to draw closer to God, to have that intimate fellowship with Him. The problem many times is that we don't know how to do it and we become frustrated. Let me say this, we tend to make things very complicated when they are not.

Remember what James told us, and listen very carefully because it is very simple. In James 4:7-10 we are told, **“Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.”**

The Amplified Bible puts these verses like this, **“So be subject to God. Resist the devil [stand firm against him], and he will flee from you. Come close to God and He will come close to you. [Recognize that you are] sinners, get your soiled hands clean; [realize that you have been disloyal] wavering individuals with divided interests, and purify your hearts [of your spiritual adultery]. [As you draw near to God] be deeply penitent and grieve, even weep [over your disloyalty]. Let your laughter be turned to grief and your mirth to dejection and heartfelt shame [for your sins]. Humble yourselves [feeling very insignificant] in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you [He will lift you up and make your lives significant].”**

James doesn't pull any punches here! Notice what James is saying. When he speaks of submitting to God he is speaking of ranking ourselves under His authority. We are to voluntarily submit ourselves to the Lord. You see, if we are on the throne we have then removed the Lord from His position in our lives. Thus, we need to die to self, humble ourselves before Him and allow Him to be on the throne of our hearts!

Why don't we cast out the demon of quarrels, the demon of strife's, the demon of wars, the demon of pride and-so-on? Because we as believers cannot be demon possessed, we can be oppressed and thus, we need to stand against the temptation of the Devil and when we do, he flees. Why does he flee? Because he has no patience and he won't wait around when he can't win. Thus, place yourself under the control of God, stand against the schemes, the plans of the Devil, and he will vanish from you. Now, he will come again but continue doing what James says here, submit to God, resist the Devil and he will take a hike!

God is so good to us. Notice the *invitation* that James gives to us, to “**draw near to God**” and then we see the precious promise of God, His response to us is that, “**He will draw near to you.**” Remember what the Lord said in Jeremiah 29:11-13, “**For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.**”

God is not trying to hide Himself from us. It is not a game with God, “You are getting warmer, warmer, no, now you are getting colder” and we have to hunt for Him and try to find him like He is hiding from us! God wants to draw near to us, that is not the question but the conclusion we often come to is that He is hiding from us and that is not true and that really is the wrong question, “Does God want to draw near to us?”

The question really is, “Do we want to draw near to God?” It is like the story of the older couple driving in a car together and as she looked at the other cars passing by she noticed that the couples were sitting close to each other in their cars. So the woman said to her husband, “Honey, why is it that we don’t sit close to each other any more?” And the husband replied back to his wife, “I wasn’t the one who moved away!” Folks, if you are far from God right now, He hasn’t moved, you have! What can you do about it? Draw near to God because the invitation is there and He will draw near to you, that is His promise to you and God is more than able to fulfill His promise to you!

Now these verses are kind of interesting and I do think they speak of salvation but I also think they can apply to Christians who draw near to God. You see, what happens as we draw near to God? We see ourselves as we really are and we are convicted of our sin, not for condemnation but for edification, for being built up. In other words, as we see our sin we give it to the Lord and that garbage is purged from our lives. You see, we find cleansing at the cross, and in this case, not for salvation, we are already saved, but for sanctification.

Paul, in I Thessalonians 4:3-8 speaks of our sanctification as he says, **“For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God; that no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified. For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness. Therefore he who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit.”** And in I Peter 5:10-11 we are told, **“But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.”** That is what God is doing in us, if we let Him!

We don't come before the Lord with a self-righteous attitude but we come before Him in humility and as we do, the Lord showers us with His grace and God's grace always lifts us up! In fact, God's grace never ends; He keeps giving and giving, showering us with His grace! Back in James 4:6 notice what James tells us, "**But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: 'God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.'**" The Amplified Bible puts this verse like this, "**But He gives us more and more grace (power of the Holy Spirit, to meet this evil tendency and all others fully). That is why He says, God sets Himself against the proud and haughty, but gives grace [continually] to the lowly (those who are humble enough to receive it). [Prov 3:34.]**" God's grace is so rich, it is so deep, it is unending and of this grace J. A. Motyer writes,

What comfort there is in this verse! It tells us that God is tirelessly on our side. He never falters in respect of our needs, he always has more grace at hand for us. He is never less than sufficient, he always has more and yet more to give. Whatever we may forfeit when we put self first, we cannot forfeit our salvation, for there is always more grace. No matter what we do to him, he is never beaten. We may play false to the grace of election, contradict the grace of reconciliation, overlook the grace of indwelling — but he gives more grace. Even if we were to turn to him and say, "What I have received so far is much less than enough," he would reply, "Well, you may have more." His resources are never at an end, his patience is never exhausted, his initiative never stops, his generosity knows no limit: he gives more grace.

- J. A. Motyer, The Message of James, p. 150

On the other hand, selfishness does not bring forth grace for we have closed the door to God and we may try to exalt self, but that attitude always brings us down. We are told, in Luke 18:9-14, **“Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: ‘Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, “God, I thank You that I am not like other men — extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.” And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, “God, be merciful to me a sinner!” I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”**”

Folks, the more we look at God, the more we see His holiness, His glory, the more we will see ourselves as sinners and there is no pride in that, only humility. It is as Peter said in I Peter 5:5-7, **“Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for ‘God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.’ Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.”**

So this morning, with the rest of our time, I would like to look at some Scriptures that will help us drawn near to God, Scriptures that will help us draw close to Him, things we can do to help us grow in our relationship with Him. And what a great way to start this New Year, even though we are 2 weeks into it, but to draw near to God. Think about it, Jesus did not come to keep us from Hell, even though that is a benefit. He came to restore our fellowship with God because sin had separated us from God, it broke that fellowship and apart from those sins being taken away, we could never have fellowship with God!

Listen carefully to what Isaiah 59:1-2 tells us, **“Behold, the Lord’s hand is not shortened, That it cannot save; Nor His ear heavy, That it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden His face from you, So that He will not hear.”**

Now listen to how The Amplified Bible puts these verses, **“BEHOLD, THE Lord’s hand is not shortened at all, that it cannot save, nor His ear dull with deafness, that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear.”**

And The Living Bible puts these verses like this, **“Listen now! The Lord isn’t too weak to save you. And he isn’t getting deaf! He can hear you when you call! But the trouble is that your sins have cut you off from God. Because of sin he has turned his face away from you and will not listen anymore.”**

I think that is pretty clear, our sins have cut us off from God and thus, Jesus came to restore that fellowship or as Peter put it, **“For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit.”** I Peter 3:18.

Notice what Peter tells us, it is the solution to the problem we just read of in Isaiah 59:1-2. Jesus suffered for our sins, He died for our sins, He paid the price for our sins. He was perfectly just and He paid for the sins of the unjust. And what was the purpose of all this? No, Jesus did not come just to have our sins forgiven. No, Jesus did not come just to keep us out of Hell, as I have said. Yes, that is all true but as Peter tells us, **“that He might bring us to God.”** In other words, to restore that fellowship with God that sin had broken!

Remember when Jesus gave up His Spirit, when He died, the curtain in the temple that separated the holy place from the holy of holies was torn from top to bottom. God tore that curtain and opened the way for man to come before God through Jesus Christ!

This verb, **“He might bring”** in the Greek is PROSAGO, (pros-ag'-o) and it speaks of the specific purpose of what Jesus did, as I have said. In classical Greek this noun refers to the one making the introduction and thus, Jesus is introducing us to the Father you might say. You see, in the ancient courts certain officials controlled access to the king and they would introduce a person, bring them before the king. That is exactly what Jesus has done for us.

Now, if Jesus has done this for us, if His purpose to pay in full the penalty for our sins was to bring us to God the Father, then why do we take fellowship so lightly? You see, we need to take this seriously, Jesus died so that we could have fellowship with God and to brush that aside is to ignore, to belittle, to demean the work that He has done. So let's look at a few verses and see how we can draw close to God, things that would build us up in the faith and not tear us down!

The first Scripture reference I want to look at is in Ephesians 4:17-24 where we are told, **“This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.”**

In these verses we see two kinds of people, those that walk in darkness and those that walk in the light of Christ. The problem comes when we as Christians, those that are in the light, begin to go backwards and start walking in the darkness once again. This is not going to build you up but bring you down. And Paul's point is this, this is where he has brought his reader so far in his letter to the Ephesians, because of all the blessings we have in Christ, because of the unity we walk in Christ, our walk or our conduct should be far different than that of the unsaved world. Paul, in II Corinthians 5:17 tells us,

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new." Thus, we are brand new in Christ; don't go back walking in the old ways, the old life, but walk in purity!

How does the unsaved walk? Paul lists several characteristics for us. And again, keep in mind that we can go back in that direction, we can backslide, so it is a warning to us, that if we want to draw close to God, don't go back to the world!

Paul starts out by saying that they walk in the futility uselessness of their mind. What does that mean? In other words, their focus is on empty things and they truly believe that they will find satisfaction in sin. Maybe for a time, but sin will never give you lasting satisfaction, it will not bring to you abundant life, but bondage! And think about the unfruitful, the useless things that our minds focused upon before we were saved and thus, don't go back!

He then speaks of their understanding being darkened. Why is that? The reason this is true is because they reject the light of Jesus Christ and thus, God gives them over to a debased mind, a wicked mind and darkness is what then flows from their lives. Yes, some are living a darker life than others, but apart from Christ there is no light in them. Thus don't become darkened, you know the things of God; they have been opened up to you by the Spirit of God and the Word of God so don't go back into the darkness!

Paul then says that they are alienated from the life of God, that seems harsh. It is, but it is true. And the reason this is true is because sin has separated them from God and they refuse to receive the free gift of God in Jesus. They are ignorant because they refuse to see. They are insensitive to the things of God because they have hardened their hearts to the things of God. The word "**hardening**" is the Greek word POROSIS (po'-ro-sis) and it started out meaning a stone that is harder than marble but finally came to mean the loss of all sensation. They are unable to feel because they have made themselves hard to the things of God and when God speaks, it bounces off of them, it does not penetrate into their hearts! Thus, don't go back there!

Thus, by rejecting God they have given themselves over to "**lewdness**" or ASELGEIA (as-elg'-i-a) in the Greek and it speaks of a person who no longer hides his sin but displays it as long as he can gratify his own desires. They are "**unclean**" or impure in their thoughts and actions. We also see "**greediness**" or PLEONEXIA (pleh-on-ex-ee'-ah) in the Greek and it speaks of an irresistible desire to have what we have no right to possess.

Folks, if you can live in sin without conviction upon your life, something is very wrong. Let me illustrate this for you with this story. We are told:

After Dr. Donald Barnhouse, the classic preacher from a generation ago, shared a message about the repercussions of sin, a young man approached him and said, “I sin, but it doesn’t seem to matter at all. I’m not haunted by it. I don’t get depressed about it. It doesn’t bother me a bit.”

Dr. Barnhouse looked at him and said, “Tell me, son, what would happen if I dropped an eight-hundred-pound weight on the body of a dead man? Would he feel it? Would he be in pain? Would it bother him?”

“Of course not,” said the young man.

“That’s the point,” said Dr. Barnhouse. “If you don’t feel the weight of sin, if it’s not heavy upon you, if it’s not having an impact on you, it’s because you are spiritually dead.”

We as Christians have this struggle between the old life and the new life, and in regards to this John MacArthur tells us:

Biblical terminology, then, does not say that a Christian has two different natures. He has but one nature, the new nature in Christ. The old self dies and the new self lives; they do not coexist. It is not a remaining old nature but the remaining garment of sinful flesh that causes Christians to sin. The Christian is a single new person, a totally new creation, not a spiritual schizophrenic. It is the filthy coat of remaining humanness in which the new creation dwells that continues to hinder and contaminate his living. The believer as a total person is transformed but not yet wholly perfect. He has residing sin but no longer reigning sin (cf. Rom 6:14). He is no longer the old man corrupted but is now the new man created in righteousness and holiness, awaiting full salvation (cf. Rom 13:11).

- John MacArthur

Then in verse 20 of Ephesians chapter 4 Paul makes a very simple point. He tells them and us that when you first were saved this is not what you learned of Christ and yet some have walked backward into the old ways, not walking in purity! You see, we don't just add Jesus to our old life, the old life is dead, crucified with Christ and we are a new creation in Christ. Folks, there must be a break with the past!

Too often, for some Christians, the Christian life is all about knowing facts regarding the Scriptures. Now don't get me wrong, having the correct doctrine is important for us but unless you apply that doctrine to your life, it is worthless, it is empty. And it is a choice on our part, a choice we must make and as we surrender our lives to Him, walking in His ways, our mind will be transformed.

With our minds being transformed our actions will flow from this new nature we have in Christ as Paul shows us in Romans 12:1-2, **“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”**

The Amplified Bible puts these verses like this, **“I APPEAL to you therefore, brethren, and beg of you in view of [all] the mercies of God, to make a decisive dedication of your bodies [presenting all your members and faculties] as a living sacrifice, holy (devoted, consecrated) and well pleasing to God, which is your reasonable (rational, intelligent) service and spiritual worship.”**

You see, to learn Christ is more than just knowledge about Him; it is an intimate relationship with Him. It is a communion with our Lord and Savior. Thus, as you read God's Word, as you hear God's Word being taught, He will convict you of sin, encourage you as needed, He will bless you and-so-on. Learning Christ is not just learning about Him, but making Him part of your life!

Thus, we are told to “**put off**” the old man and his wicked ways, because, if you don’t, you will continue to become more and more corrupt. The old man, that sin nature is like an ugly monster, the more you feed it the more it grows and the more it grows the more it wants to be fed! Put it off, put it away, discard it from your life or it will control your life! Put on Christ instead!

Beginning in the late 70’s and continuing through today, people are very health conscious. All you have to do is look at a television commercial and you will see them promoting their products from a healthy standpoint. “Low Carbs!” “Fat-Free!” “No Cholesterol!” It use to be that food only needed to taste good, but now it must contain this and not that to sell! The public is aware that what you put into your body will have a direct affect on the bodies overall health. Think about it, over Christmas the average weight gain is 7 to 10 pounds. What you put into your body will affect your body!

I remember that after my grandfather was diagnosed with a stomach ulcer they put him on a very strict diet. Now this is some 45 years ago or so but the doctor put him on this diet that consisted of buttermilk and eggs for his ulcer. Of course he ate other foods but when his stomach bothered him he went back to what the doctor ordered, buttermilk! After years of living on that kind of diet he had a massive heart attack and died. Why? Because now we know that those foods have a high fat content and cause coronary artery disease. There is a direct relationship to what we put into our body and how our body responds.

So, from a physical standpoint we see that what we put into our bodies affects the health of the body. But what about our spiritual health, how is that affected? We are told in Proverbs 23:7, “**For as he thinks in his heart, so is he . . .**” And Jesus said in Matthew 12:34, “. . . **For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.**” Yes, physically you are what you eat, but spiritually you are what you think!

So Paul told us to put off the old man and put on the new man, put on Christ and he is going to begin with the transformation of our mind. Instead of focusing on the things of this world, we are to be focused on the things of God.

When we gave our lives to Jesus Christ we received a new mind. We received a completely new spiritual and moral capability. But this is a process also, that we continually renew our minds daily that we may gain the mind of Christ, (Philippians 2:5), and be more like Him. Paul’s statement in I Corinthians chapter 2 explains this for us for in those passages Paul is simply saying that the reason we have godly wisdom and understanding is because the Holy Spirit has revealed them to us. The natural man has a spirit, that is the worldly spirit that is in him and thus, he has worldly wisdom. And you can see how that plays out in the world today; it is empty for the most part!

But the Christian has the Holy Spirit indwelling him, which teaches us the “**deep things of God.**” Our wisdom comes from God. Paul ends that section, (I Corinthians 2:9-16), by saying, “. . . **But we have the mind of Christ.**” So in principle we have the mind of Christ for we have been transformed into a new creation in Christ. But in practice, it is a continual process of renewing our minds to the likeness of Christ, putting in good things so good comes out!

And in verse 24 of Ephesians chapter 4 Paul is telling us to put on an entirely new man. Not the old man cleaned up but a new man on the inside, which will overflow to the outside. Now Paul says that this “. . . **new man which was created according to God . . .**” is better translated from the Greek, “**according to what God is.**”

When we are born again into the family of God we are not transformed into the image of man but into what God is. Our actions and attitudes should reflect those of God. We should hate sin and love that which is good. Now you may be thinking that you fall far short of those standards and that is very true, we all do. But it is what we are working towards. We are new in Christ and our actions should reflect the attitudes of our heart.

Paul speaks of our actions and attitudes being “**righteous**” before God and before our fellow man. We are to have our actions reflect that of “**true holiness**” which speaks of a “sacred observance of all the duties to God.” The life of a believer is one who is totally given over to God and because of that relationship with God the love of God will be manifested in their lives and it will touch those around them, their fellow man. You see, if you love the Lord with your entire life then the way you treat your fellow man will be right!

Now here is the thing, if we refuse to obey God then we are not part of His family, the fruit in our lives shows that fact. John said in I John 2:3-6, **“Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, ‘I know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.”** You see, you can’t say that you love God and not obey what He is saying to you, it is that simple. Not that we never stumble, but if it is the pattern of our life, if what we do doesn’t bother us, we need to be concerned, we need to do a heart check!

So if you want to draw near to God, put off the old man, crucify the old man, and put on Christ, walk in Him, be lead by His Spirit. Put away those things that will bring you down, those things that will not build you up. You see, it all has to do with surrender, and as we surrender to Him, we are drawing near to Him. Remember, we are to submit to God and in doing so the Devil will flee, you will not give him room to mess with you! Thus, fill yourself up with the things of God and don’t allow the old life to regain a foothold in your life!

The next Scripture reference we are going to look at is in Philippians 4:8-9. It is a section of Scripture that should ring a bell with the youth, I call it, “Whatever” and you will see what I mean. Look at what Paul tells us, **“Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy — meditate on these things. The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.”**

Paul just finished up speaking about not being anxious about anything. That we need to give it to the Lord, lay it at His feet with thanksgiving and allow the peace of God to fill your hearts and minds in Christ. And now he just puts the icing on the cake you might say, it is an exclamation mark. This is kind of the climax of what he has been teaching on regarding our spirituality and thus, Paul tells us, **“Finally”**. And his point is this. If you want to grow in the Lord, if you want your walk to be stable in the Lord, if you want to draw close to the Lord, it is all a matter of what you are dwelling upon, what you think.

Paul says that we are to “**meditate on these things**” or “**dwell on these things**” or “**think on these things**” and he uses the Greek word Logizomai, (log-id’-zom-ah-ee) which speaks of a command. In other words, proper thinking is not an option in the Christian life. Why is that? Because we truly are a product of our thoughts, what we think about affects the way we live. Remember, that is exactly what Solomon told us in Proverbs 23:7, “**For as he thinks in his heart, so is he. . . .**” And in the New Testament Jesus tells us in Mark 7:20-23, “**And He said, ‘What comes out of a man, that defiles a man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man.’**”

I find that interesting because in today’s Christian culture you might say, with this emerging church teaching that is flooding into the church, we see people more interested in emotion and feelings instead of truth. Think about it, people don’t ask, “Is it true?” but now they say things like, “Does it work?” or “How will this make me feel?” That is in direct opposition to what Paul is saying here! John Stott also warned of the danger of Christians living by their feelings. He wrote, “Indeed, sin has more dangerous effects on our faculty of feeling than on our faculty of thinking, because our opinions are more easily checked and regulated by revealed truth than our experiences.” (Your Mind Matters, p.16).

Now listen to what James Orr had to say regarding what the Christian life should be about. He wrote,

If there is a religion in the world which exalts the office of teaching, it is safe to say that it is the religion of Jesus Christ. It has been frequently remarked that in pagan religions the doctrinal element is at a minimum — the chief thing there is the performance of a ritual. But this is precisely where Christianity distinguishes itself from other religions — it does contain doctrine. It comes to men with definite, positive teaching; it claims to be the truth; it bases religion on knowledge, though a knowledge which is only attainable under moral conditions. I do not see how any one can deal fairly with the facts as they lie before us in the Gospels and Epistles, without coming to the conclusion that the New Testament is full of doctrine. . . . A religion divorced from earnest and lofty thought has always, down the whole history of the Church, tended to become weak, jejune [irreverent], and unwholesome; while the intellect, deprived of its rights within religion, has sought its satisfaction without, and developed into godless rationalism.

- The Christian View of God and the World, pp. 20-21

In other words that old adage, “Garbage in, garbage out” is very applicable here and it is very true. What are you filling your mind with because that is what will come flowing out from your life? Paul tells us that instead of filling your mind with the garbage of this world, “**meditate**” or take an inventory of these things in your life – things that are true, noble, just, pure, lovely, things that are of good report, things that are proper, and things that are praiseworthy! Paul put it this way in Romans 12:2, and this is from The New Living Translation, “**Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will know what God wants you to do, and you will know how good and pleasing and perfect his will really is.**” And The Amplified Bible puts this verse like this, “**Do not be conformed to this world (this age), [fashioned after and adapted to its external, superficial customs], but be transformed (changed) by the [entire] renewal of your mind [by its new ideals and its new attitude], so that you may prove [for yourselves] what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God, even the thing which is good and acceptable and perfect [in His sight for you].**” It is not just information but application to our lives! You see, what we mediate on, what we focus our minds upon really does matter!

In Psalm 119:34 listen to what the Psalmist cried out, **“Give me understanding, and I shall keep Your law; Indeed, I shall observe it with my whole heart.”** And The Living Bible puts this verse like this, **“Just tell me what to do and I will do it, Lord. As long as I live I’ll wholeheartedly obey.”** And thus, what does Paul do here in Philippians? He gives us eight godly virtues to focus on, to meditate upon so that we may grow in our relationship with the Lord. It is hard to draw near to someone when you are moving in the opposite direction of them, that just makes sense. Thus, Paul is admonishing us; he is commanding us to meditate upon these things so we can move towards God, draw close to Him!

And look again at what Paul says in Philippians 4:9, **“The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.”** The Amplified Bible puts this verse like this, **“Practice what you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and model your way of living on it, and the God of peace (of untroubled, undisturbed well-being) will be with you.”**

Paul walked the walk so he could say, "Follow me as I follow Christ!" And not only will you have the peace of God in your life as you follow after Christ, surrender your life to Him, but the God of peace will also be with you! Paul put it this way in Colossians 3:15-17, "**And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.**" In other words, let your walk match up with your talk and as you let God rule in your life they will match up!

You see, as you meditate upon these things, as you fill your life with the things of God you are drawing closer to God and as you do that you can enjoy that peace in your life in the midst of the storms of life because you are dwelling in Him and not trying to accomplish things on your own! That is why Paul put this as a command, because apart from filling yourself up with God, drawing close to Him, you will not find that peace, that stability, that strength in your life! You need to be disciplined as D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones wrote,

I defy you to read the life of any saint that has ever adorned the life of the Church without seeing at once that the greatest characteristic in the life of that saint was discipline and order. Invariably it is the universal characteristic of all the outstanding men and women of God. Read about Henry Martyn, David Brainerd, Jonathan Edwards, the brothers Wesley, and Whitfield — read their journals. It does not matter what branch of the Church they belonged to, they have all disciplined their lives and have insisted upon the need for this; and obviously it is something that is thoroughly scriptural and absolutely essential.

- D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Spiritual Depression: Its Causes and Cure*

As I close this morning, please understand this. God wants us to draw close to Him, Jesus came so that we may enjoy that fellowship with Him. Thus, draw close to Him and He will draw close to you and do you know why? Because He has never moved, you have! Thus, as you draw close to Him you are just returning to Him. And so, fill yourself up with the things of God and don't allow that old life to regain a foothold in your life. And not only fill yourself up with the things of God, things that will help you to grow in Him, but apply those things to your life and see what peace, what joy, what stability God will bring into your life because you are dwelling in Him!

Let me close with these words from John Wesley, who wrote, "I want the whole Christ for my Savior, the whole Bible for my book, the whole Church for my fellowship, and the whole world for my mission field." May we have that kind of passion, that kind of devotion to the Lord! ***DRAW CLOSE TO GOD AND HE WILL DRAW CLOSE TO YOU!***