

MEDITATE ON THESE THINGS

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I. Philippians 4:6-9 – Introduction¹

A. Philippians 4:6-9 (NKJV)²

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. 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. (Philippians 4:6-9)

II. God's Recipe for Peace in Times of Trouble

A. Overview

1. Cause for Anxiety

The passage begins by recognizing that all through history, people have had cause for anxiety. In this respect, the time in which we live is no different than any other.

- a) History is riddled with momentous events. The more significant events are recorded in our history books. Invasions, wars, famines, plagues, times of financial crisis, and the like.
- b) Occasionally, a rare period of relative peace may intervene where such events are held at bay. But until the Prince of Peace arrives, such times generally only extend over a limited geographical area, or over a short period of time.
- c) Even during periods when the history books record relatively little in the way of major calamity, the continual background drama of individual lives continues bringing disappointment, injustice, violence, sickness, disease, injury, and the ever-present enemy: aging and death.

2. Peace Beyond Circumstance

Yet in the midst of all these adversities, this timeless passage extends the promise of peace. Not just any peace, but a true peace which comes from God. A peace which does not depend upon the external circumstances we find ourselves in. A peace which surpasses our ability to comprehend or understand.

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In the interest of size, sermon illustrations have been omitted.

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3. The True Source of Peace

Twice in the passage before us, Paul identifies the source of this surpassing peace.

- a) In verse 7, Paul refers to "the peace of God" -- that is, the peace which comes from God.
- b) In verse 9, He uses a similar phrase, "the God of peace" -- emphasizing that true peace is found only through an intimate relationship and knowledge of God. A peace which has both its source and focus in the one sovereign power in the universe: God.

B. Preconditions

As desirable as this peace may be, it is not automatically ours. Paul identifies two preconditions which any man or woman must meet should he or she attain such peace.

1. 1st Precondition for Peace.

An intimate relationship with God.

- a) It is prayer and supplication to God which results in the peace of God guarding one's heart and mind.
- b) Moreover, the peace that guards one's heart and mind is said to be through Christ Jesus. The person who would attain this peace must be among those "born again" by the power of the Holy Spirit placing them "in Christ."
- c) Those who don't know God are unable to meet this condition. Atheists and followers of other religions may believe they experience peace. But such peace is not the peace Paul speaks of here.
 - (1) Their peace is either delusional—often involving demonic influence--or temporal in nature. In many cases, it is found through a denial of physical reality, as in the mind-games of such cults as Christian Science which denies the reality of sickness, or in the deprivation and trances of mystery religions which seek to induce altered states of consciousness.
 - (2) Such peace will always be illusory and temporary because it short-circuits God-given awareness and attempts to substitute an imagined reality in place of one's real circumstances.

2. 2nd Precondition for Peace.

Willing obedience to God's commands.

- a) This peace is dispensed by God to individuals who not only are in unity of relationship with Him, but who also walk according to the commands found here and elsewhere in Scripture.
- b) Commands
"Commands?" you say . . . what commands?!
- c) When we read passages such as this, we can make the mistake of interpreting the instructions of the writer as "suggestions" or "good ideas" or even "helpful hints for Christian living."

- d) Yet the passage employs verbs in the imperative mood – the mood which Greek uses when giving commands.
- (1) Among the imperative verbs found within this passage we find
- (a) Verse 6 - “[do not] be anxious!”
and
“make known [every petition]!”
 - (b) Verse 8 - “meditate [on these things]!”
 - (c) Verse 9 - “do [these things]!”
- e) These commands identify actions which the believer must take in order to attain the beneficial conditions or promises.

III. Exposition

A. Verse 6 reads:

“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God”

1. The verse begins, “Be anxious for nothing . . .”

- a) The word order in the Greek is reversed from the English. It reads, “Not [even for] one thing be worrying”
 - (1) The emphasis is on “not one thing” which appears at the beginning of the sentence.
 - (a) Paul is not just addressing anxiety and worry in general, but anxiety and worry in their totality—even over a single thing.
 - (b) Even if most things in our life are going well, all it takes is one thing to threaten our sense of peace. Our anxiety over one issue often undermines the numerous other blessings in our lives.
 - (c) The emphasis on “not one thing” also tells us that the size or perceived importance of that which causes our anxiety is immaterial—we are to treat both “big” and “little” worries in the same way by taking them to God.
 - (2) Followed by an imperative present tense command
“not for one thing be [presently, in an ongoing fashion] anxious!”
 - (3) Kenneth Wuest, in his expanded translation, puts it this way:
“Stop worrying about even one thing”³
- b) Next follows the conjunction, “but” - which serves as the fulcrum of a see-saw where related concepts are juxtaposed for intentional contrast.

- (1) On the one hand, be anxious "for nothing" BUT, on the other hand, "in everything" let your requests be known.
- (2) On the one hand there is "anxiety" BUT, on the other hand there is to be "thanksgiving"
 - (a) A perspective of gratefulness instead of dread.
 - (b) An attitude of bounty rather than lack.
- c) Paul tells us to "let your requests be made known to God"
 - (1) The peace which is spoken of in this passage is not obtained by playing mind games such as denying reality or pretending the situation is different than it actually is.
 - (a) These requests are to include our most basic gut-level needs, not just things that we might pray for in a formal group prayer meeting.
 - (b) Kenneth Weust's expanded translation refers to this prayer as, "a cry for your personal needs."⁴
 - (2) We are commanded to make our needs known to God and then to rest in knowing He hears and will respond as He deems appropriate and we must rest in that.
 - (a) This requires a strong conviction in the sovereignty of God in order for us to trust the results to God.
 - (b) John spoke of this conviction in relation to prayer in 1 John 5:14-15: "Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him."
 - (c) Only when we know He hears us and are convinced He has the best in mind for us are we able to rest in the results which are according to His sovereign control.
 - (d) Jesus put it this way in Matthew 6:25-27:
"Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?"

B. Moving on to verse 7, we read:

"and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

1. Whenever you see 'and,' especially where it begins a verse, you can envision the verses as a train of boxcars where the verse which follows is hitched to what went before. It is "towed," as-it-were, by what went before. It won't run down the tracks without that "engine" which preceded.
 - a) One's heart and mind will not be guarded by the peace of God unless those things which Paul set forth in verse 6 are diligently pursued.
 - b) This "peace of God" could be rendered "peace from God" as it refers to peace which comes from God—that finds its source in the person of God and most importantly, our relation to Him (Eph. 1:2).
 - c) The relational aspect is emphasized in the way in which the peace is applied to our hearts and minds—through Christ Jesus.
 - (1) The Greek preposition behind the word "through" can also be rendered by the word "in" -- as we find it in many modern translations.
 - (2) Because of our unique position, as born-again believers *in Christ*, all true Christians have peace *with* God. We may or may not feel the peace of our reconciliation, yet it is a legal and Scriptural fact and one of the first results of our salvation.
 - (3) Our having peace *with* God, through Christ Jesus also places us in a position where the peace spoken of here, peace *from* God—with God as its source—becomes a possibility.
 - (4) Unlike peace *with* God which is the possession of all believers, peace *from* God is not enjoyed by all. Its attainment is not automatic, as Paul's instructions in this passage make clear.
 - d) This peace from God is said to surpass all understanding.
 - (1) The term for "surpass" in the original carries with it the idea of being "held above" or "towering above" our human intellect.
 - (2) It is something which a believer can *experience*, but cannot *comprehend*. Since its source is God, the means by which it operates in each situation is not reducible by the puny logic of man.
 - (3) In a cold, naturalistic sense, this peace doesn't "make sense," because it prevails in the midst of non-peaceful circumstances. It is a unique kind of peace.
 - (4) In the upper-room discourse, recorded in the Book of John, where Jesus celebrated the Last Supper with His disciples, He knew a time was coming when they would experience circumstances that would bring great anxiety—He would be *crucified* and they *scattered*.

- (a) Jesus referred to this peace which differs in quality and perspective from peace which depends upon external circumstance. He said, "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:26).
 - (b) Later, that same evening, Jesus said:
"Indeed the hour is coming, yes, has now come, that you will be scattered, each to his own, and will leave Me alone. And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me. These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." (John 16:31-33).
- (5) Jesus refers to a peace which He says is found "in Me" and which overcomes the anxiety and worry in the world. It is found through identification with Christ and results in a security which transcends any natural dilemma.
- (a) Since this peace is said to be beyond our comprehension, it would be the presumptuous to attempt to analyze it in detail. However, the Scriptures reveal several keys which contribute toward its attainment in the life of the believer.
 - i) Key #1 – Perspective
The more we see the world and our part in it through the eyes of Scripture, the more we will attain a perspective which places us in a position beyond our circumstances.
 - a) This is the perspective of the future martyrs recorded in chapter 12 of the Book of Revelation. We are told they "did not love their lives to the death."
 - b) Jesus referred to this patient perspective when he predicted the persecution which would fall upon his followers:
"You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, relatives and friends; and they will put [some] of you to death. And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But not a hair of your head shall be lost. By your patience possess your souls. (Luke 21:16-19)
 - c) This patience that Jesus referred to bridges the gap between the external circumstances we find ourselves in and the internal oasis of peace found in knowing our ultimate safety and destiny is beyond this life—rooted in God Himself.

- ii) Key #2 – Faith or Belief
 - Not only must we have a Scriptural perspective on the truth, but we must be *convinced* of that truth in the core of our being. That we *have* eternal life. That we *will* pass safely through physical death. That to die and be with Christ *is* gain. That having clothing, food, and water *are* enough.
 - a) We read these things in the Scriptures, but unless we wash our minds with them continually and meditate on them, the perspective of this world will continually steal our focus away and draw us away from the peace that should be ours.
 - b) All of us do what we truly believe—what we are convinced of. If our Christian faith amounts to a casual acquaintance with a nice leather-bound book rather than a serious commitment to a way of life, then we won't have the proper perspective when the day arrives and our own test comes.
- C. Paul continues in verse 8:
- “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.”
1. One could probably spend an entire sermon exploring the adjectives found within this verse.
 - a) Rather than dissect the terms, just think of them as being the summation of all that is good, holy, uplifting, and constructive.
 2. Paul tells us to *meditate* on these wholesome things.
 - a) The Greek term behind “meditate” carries the basic meaning to “think according to logical rules.” Notice two very important words in this description: think and logic.
 - (1) Christian meditation does not attempt to circumvent the rational intellect. In fact, true Christian meditation finds the intellect *fully engaged*—firing on all cylinders.
 - (2) This is part of loving God with all our *mind*.
 - (3) “The [Greek] word [for meditate] implies a process of reasoning.”⁵
 - (4) Other belief systems want us to “check our rationality at the door”, encouraging adherents to embrace a realm of the experiential unchaperoned by rational evaluation and cognizance.

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Wuest, K. S. (1997, c1984). *Wuest's word studies from the Greek New Testament : For the English reader* (Ro 2:3). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

- (a) But such a realm is where very real spiritual forces of unfamiliar sophistication and dark influence do their work.
- (b) The informed Christian avoids such places!
- (5) The Christian form of meditation is not the “drifting,” “oozing” type associated with mysticism. Christian meditation embodies concepts such as “reckoning,” “calculating,” “considering,” “estimating,” and “evaluating.”
- (6) It is a stayed consideration of the subject—full of reason and reflection—denoting “a settled persuasion or assurance.”⁶
- (7) The idea of persuasion is seen when Paul uses this same term in the Book of Romans where he relates that Abraham *believed* God and it was accounted to him for righteousness (Rom. 4:3 cf. Jas. 2:23).
 - (a) Abraham's belief—his settled persuasion and assurance—was the fruit of reason and reflection upon God's promises.
- b) But what happens when we meditate upon what the culture typically serves up rather than these wholesome things?
 - (1) Instead of developing a settled assurance and peace, we are inexorably and subtly conformed to the culture rather than to God.
 - (2) As Paul puts it elsewhere:

“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.” (Romans 12:2)
 - (3) And so there is a battle ground in the *mind* of the believer between the *transforming* renewal of God's Word and the *conforming* influence of the world.
 - (a) “World” in this passage is a Greek word (αἰών) which can also be translated “age.”
 - (b) R/ C. Trench said it “includes all the thoughts, opinions, maxims, speculations, impulses, and aspirations present in the world at any given time, which may be impossible to accurately define but which still constitute a real and effective power—the *moral or immoral atmosphere we breath*. Bengel called it the subtle *shaping spirit* of the *kosmos*, or world of people, who are living alienated and apart from God.”⁷
 - (c) The companion term for “world” is a Greek term from which we get our work “cosmos.” Kenneth Wuest describes its use as follows:

“κόσμος is used to refer to the world system, wicked, and alienated from

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Vincent, M. R. (2002). *Word studies in the New Testament* (1:672). Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

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R. C. Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrikson Publishers, 1989), p. 230. ISBN:1-56563-559-0.

God, yet cultured, educated, powerful, outwardly moral and religious—the system in which Satan is the head, the fallen angels and demons are his servants, and all mankind other than the saved are his subjects. This includes those people, pursuits, pleasures, purposes, and places where God is not wanted.”⁸

(4) Unfortunately, many of us are soaking in the messages of the culture—a culture where God is not wanted--rather than meditating on “these things.” The inevitable result is that we are becoming “WORLD-ians” rather than “CHRIST-ians.”

(5) One need not look far for evidence that this is so.

(a) The divorce rate among Christians.

i) Research shows that the divorce rate among those describing themselves as born-again Christians ranges between every 4th to every 3rd married couple.⁹

ii) Thus, Christian practices in marriage have more in common with the culture (with a divorce rate of between 40 and 50 percent)--than with the words of Jesus (e.g., Mtt. 5:32).

(b) The number of “pro-choice” Christians: a biblical oxymoron.

(c) Christian materialism and financial practices.

The monetary behavior of many Christians is modeled after the culture rather than God' s Word.

(d) Insensitivity to crudity, violence, and horror.

D. As it has often been quipped, “we are what we eat.”

1. What an interesting experiment it would be to keep a notepad handy around the house and record how much time we spend thinking on the noble and lovely things versus their opposites?

a) Sometimes we live as if Paul had written the exact opposite in Philippians 4:8: “Whatever things are **rumored**, whatever things [are] **crass**, whatever things [are] **unjust**, whatever things [are] **tainted**, whatever things [are] **shocking**, whatever things [are] of **sensational** report, if [there is] any **corruption** and if [there is] anything **accusatory**—think on *these things*.”

2. How often we complain, “I can't find time to study the bible.” Yet how easily we find hours each week to sit under the sway negative elements served up by the culture.

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Kenneth S. Wuest, *The Practical Use of the Greek New Testament* (Chicago, IL: Moody Bible Institute, 1982), p. 79. ISBN:0-8024-6737-7.

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http://www.religioustolerance.org/chr_dira.htm The average divorce rate in America is somewhere between 40 and 50 percent (<http://www.divorcerate.org/>).

E. Proudful & Overconfident

1. Is this not an indication of our pride? That we are overconfident in our ability to routinely partake of that which reflects the priorities of the culture without adverse effects?
2. In our pride, we mistakenly believe we can expose ourselves to these ungodly things and not be influenced. "We're mature," we say to ourselves."
3. The truth is we are being progressively twisted in subtle ways we aren't even aware of. Degree by degree—just like the proverbial frog in the boiling pot.

IV. Clarification

A. In closing, I want to clarify two points lest I be misunderstood.

1. #1 - Separate Media from Content
 - a) I am not condemning the *means* by which information is disseminated, be it music, video, television, or the Internet. The delivery vehicle is morally neutral. What I am asking us to consider and what Paul is underscoring is the *content*.
 - b) Wholesome, uplifting Christian messages--although more difficult to find--are also delivered over these same information channels.
2. #2 - Motivation
 - a) Our motivation for obedience to Paul's commands must be *love*, not *legalism*.
 - (1) It's not about shutting out the culture entirely and becoming social prudes. It's about whether the material or activity would please or grieve God.
 - (2) This is especially relevant in areas which some Christians would consider "gray" or "seemingly innocuous" such as some forms of fantasy or pure entertainment.
 - b) Our walk with God is not motivated by religious practice, but by our desire for an ever closer relationship.
 - (1) Our embracing of the culture moves us further from God
 - (2) As John observed, love of world is enmity with God (1 John 2:15-16).
 - (3) The question we each must answer is:
If we truly love Him, why do we participate in activities and imbibe messages which grieve Him?

V. Passage in Greek¹⁰

6 μηδὲν μεριμνᾶτε, ἀλλ' ἐν παντὶ τῇ προσευχῇ καὶ τῇ δεήσει μετὰ εὐχαριστίας τὰ αἰτήματα ὑμῶν γνωρίζεσθω πρὸς τὸν θεόν.

7 καὶ ἡ εἰρήνη τοῦ θεοῦ ἡ ὑπερέχουσα πάντα νοῦν φρουρήσει τὰς καρδίας ὑμῶν καὶ τὰ νοήματα ὑμῶν ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ.

8 Τὸ λοιπόν, ἀδελφοί, ὅσα ἐστὶν ἀληθῆ, ὅσα σεμνά, ὅσα δίκαια, ὅσα ἀγνά, ὅσα προσφιλῆ, ὅσα εὐφημα, εἴ τις ἀρετὴ καὶ εἴ τις ἔπαινος, ταῦτα λογίζεσθε.

9 ἃ καὶ ἐμάθετε καὶ παρελάβετε καὶ ἠκούσατε καὶ εἶδετε ἐν ἐμοί, ταῦτα πράσσετε· καὶ ὁ θεὸς τῆς εἰρήνης ἔσται μεθ' ὑμῶν.

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Nestle, E., Nestle, E., Aland, K., Aland, B., & Universität Münster. Institut für Neutestamentliche Textforschung. (1993, c1979). Novum Testamentum Graece. At head of title: Nestle-Aland. (27. Aufl., rev.) (521). Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung.