

Excellent Characteristics Of The Christian Life (1)

[The Expression of a Life Which Lives Christ]

Scripture Reading: Phil. 4:5-9

As we come now to 4:5-9, we find eight excellent characteristics. In the first three chapters of Philippians Paul refers to the inner reality of the experience of Christ. He mentions to live is Christ and speaks of taking Christ as our pattern and counting all things loss, (1:21, 2:5-11, 3:8) But prior to chapter four, he does not give any illustrations of the outer expression of this reality. If we enjoy Christ and experience Him, we shall have a certain inner reality. Such an inward reality invariably issues in an outward expression. In 4:5-9, we find a full expression of this inward reality, a full expression of a life that lives Christ.

FORBEARANCE

The first aspect of the expression of a life that lives Christ is forbearance. In a life that lives Christ there will be forbearance, but no anxiety, no worry. Paul considers forbearance and the lack of anxiety as the first two aspects of the expression of a life that lives Christ. A life that lives Christ is calm, tranquil, peaceful, and quiet. A life of turmoil, on the contrary, is a life that lives Satan. Forbearance is the most important element of a tranquil life. Forbearance is reasonableness and consideration in dealing with others. To have forbearance is to deal with others without strictness of legal right. If we would live a calm life, we must have forbearance. Forbearance includes patience and moderation, but goes beyond them. If you have forbearance, you will not argue with others, fight with them, or debate with them. You may have a great deal to say, but you will have patience and moderation in dealing with others and will not say anything in response to provocation or irritation.

Forbearance is versus rivalry and vainglory, two negative things mentioned by Paul. Forbearance is also opposed to murmurings and reasonings. Some saints are given to the pursuit of rivalry and vainglory, whereas others are given to murmurings and reasonings. Whenever we have rivalry, vainglory, murmurings, and reasonings, there is no calm, no tranquility, no forbearance. The first aspect of a life which lives Christ is tranquility. If we live Christ, we shall not argue with others. We shall know what is the right time to speak even a calm word. Even a calm statement made at the wrong time can contribute to an argument. If you reply as soon as someone offends you, your word will not be one of forbearance. If someone is angry with you, it is best not to say anything. Exercise forbearance and wait for the right time to utter a calm word. It may be wise not even to call on the Lord aloud. Such a calling may stir up trouble. Instead of speaking outwardly, calm yourself, call on the Lord inwardly, and wait until the situation is tranquil before you say anything. To live in this way requires grace.

I have wondered why after covering such profound matters in the first three chapters, Paul says in 4:5, "Let your forbearance be known to all men." Compared with what Paul has already covered, forbearance seems to be a secondary matter. However, in a very practical way, forbearance is a test of whether or not we live Christ. In 4:5 Paul also says, "The Lord is near." While this may be a reference to the Lord's coming, it is more likely and primarily a reminder that the Lord's presence is with us. The Lord is near; He is with us. When we live Him, taking Him as our pattern and counting all things loss in order to gain Him, we sense that He is present with us. He is near both in space and in time. In space, He is close to us, ready to help; in time, He is at hand, coming soon. Since the Lord is near, what need is there for us to be troubled and stirred up?

When we live Christ, knowing that He is near, you will show forth such a forbearance, such a moderate and tranquil attitude. But when you are striving in rivalry for vainglory or when you are murmuring or reasoning, you do not have this forbearance. This lack of forbearance proves that you are not living Christ. The first test of our living Christ is whether or not we express forbearance. Paul had no intention of teaching us to be patient and to bear difficulties in ourselves. If we are living Christ, we should let others know our forbearance. They should see that we are calm, tranquil, and moderate and that nothing can disturb our inward calm. However, when we are not calm, we surely are not in Christ. Then in our experience the Lord is not near. Instead of calm, we may have anxiety, which destroys our tranquility and causes us to lose the inward peace. Whenever we lose our tranquility, we are unable to live Christ. It is not possible to fight with others or to argue and at the same time to live Christ. Living Christ requires absolute tranquility, absolute calm.

WITHOUT ANXIETY

Often when we hear bad news, we worry and fall into anxiety. Anxiety undermines the living of Christ. Instead of being anxious, in everything by prayer and petition with thanksgiving we should make our requests known to God. Then the peace of God will guard our hearts and thoughts in Christ Jesus (**v.7**). The peace of God saves us from worry and anxiety. Being free from anxiety is for the purpose of keeping us calm and tranquil. In verse 6 Paul charges us "in everything, by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God." The words *in everything* refer to the many different things which happen to us day by day. Under the Lord's blessing, many positive things happen, and we hear good news. However, we also experience negative things and hear bad news. Nevertheless, in everything by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, we should make our requests known to God. Prayer is general with the essence of worship and fellowship; petition is special for particular needs. Notice that Paul says "with thanksgiving," not "and thanksgiving." This indicates that both our prayer and petition should be accompanied by thanksgiving to the Lord.

It may seem easy to understand Paul's word, "Let your requests be made known to God." The phrase *to God* may also be rendered "before God" or "in the presence of God." The Greek preposition is *pros*, often translated "with" (**John 1:1; Mark 9:19; 2Cor. 5:8; 1Cor. 16:6; 1John 1:2**). It denotes motion towards, in the sense of a living union and communion, implying fellowship. Hence, the force of *to God*, here, is *in fellowship with God*. We should let our requests be made known to God in such a fellowship, in such a union and communion. This requires that we pray to contact God. In our prayer to God there must be the essence of worship and fellowship, and also petitions for particular needs. Even if we do not have specific needs, we still need a time of prayer day by day to worship the Lord and have fellowship with Him. As we worship the Lord and have fellowship with Him in prayer, we enjoy communion with Him and practice the organic union with Him. The issue, the result, of practicing the organic union with the Lord is that the peace of God guards our hearts and thoughts in Christ Jesus (**v.7**). The peace of God is actually God as peace (**v.9**), infused into us through our fellowship with Him by prayer. This peace is the counterpoise [counterweight] of troubles and the antidote to anxiety (**John 16:33**).

Bad news or difficult situations may cause us to worry or to be anxious. We find the antidote to this anxiety when we pray, practice communion with God, and enjoy the organic union. Then spontaneously, even unconsciously, the peace of God is transfused into our inner being. This transfused peace becomes the counterpoise of trouble and becomes the antidote to anxiety. From experience we know that through prayer we receive this antidote to anxiety when the peace of God is infused into us. Having the peace of God, as the counterpoise to our troubles, does not mean that the troubles will disappear. The troubles remain, but we have a counterpoise. Furthermore, the poison of anxiety is still within us, but we have an antidote—the peace of God transfused into our being through our fellowship with God in prayer. When we enjoy God as our peace, we are made calm within. In verse 7, Paul says that the peace of God will guard our hearts and our thoughts in Christ Jesus. The Greek word rendered "guard" may also be rendered "mount guard over." The God of peace patrols or stands guard before our hearts and thoughts in Christ. The heart is the source, and the thoughts are the issue. The peace of God guards both our hearts and our thoughts. This means that in Christ Jesus the peace of God patrols as a guard who goes back and forth before our hearts and our thoughts. The peace of God which patrols within our inner being in such a way keeps us calm and tranquil. Even though we may have many troubles and much anxiety, nothing will disturb us. This is not a mere teaching, but a word which corresponds to our experience. From experience we know that the peace of God infused into us keeps us calm.

Toward man we need the forbearance mentioned in verse 5, and with God we need the fellowship to which Paul refers in verses 6 and 7. As two leading aspects of the expression of a life that lives Christ, forbearance and fellowship cause us to remain calm inwardly. In this way we shall become a tranquil people. This does not mean, however, that nothing negative will happen to us. Rather, it means that we need not be disturbed by negative things. Do not complain about your living situation. Live Christ! The first expression of your living of Christ will be forbearance. To say that we should be forbearing and free of anxiety does not mean that every day we shall receive only good news. Quite often Satan will send us bad news. But we need not be troubled by this bad news, for we have the peace of God, God Himself as peace, within us, guarding our inner feelings. However, if we would experience this peace of God, we need to pray and have fellowship with God. In 4:5-7, Paul does not mention a third thing apart from forbearance and not having anxiety. Instead, he simply points out two important aspects of a life that lives Christ—that we have forbearance, but no anxiety. When we are forbearing and free from anxiety, we are kept tranquil and in a calm atmosphere. Then we can live Christ and have the full enjoyment of Christ.