

EXCELLENT CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE – (2)

[Governing Aspects of a Life that Lives Christ]

Scripture Reading: Phil. 4:5-9

Whatever Is (What Things are) True –the first governing aspect of a life that lives Christ is “whatever is true.” (v.8) The word *true* here means *truthful ethically*, not merely true in matter of fact. In the expression of a life that lives Christ there can be *no falsehood, no lying*. Everything we do or say must be truthful. No one who lives Christ should practice falsehood of any kind. A life that is the expression of Christ is a truthful one. **Whatever Is (What Things are) Honorable** - The second aspect is “whatever is honorable.” (v.8) The Greek word rendered *honorable* means *venerable, worthy of reverence, noble, grave (1Tim.3:8,11;Titus 2:2), implying the idea of dignity, which inspires and invites reverence*. A life that lives Christ will be honorable, noble, grave, solid, weighty, and dignified. Such a person has God within him. He is a vessel containing God as his worth, weight, and dignity. To have dignity is not to act important; it is to live God. If we live Him, we shall have true dignity. When others see us bearing such a dignity, they will have a deep respect for us. The dignity implied in the Greek word for *honorable* always inspires a profound respect.

Whatever Is (What Things are) Righteous - Paul also speaks of “whatever is righteous.” (Phil.4:8) This refers to what is right (not just) before God and man. **Whatever Is (What Things are) Pure** - The word *pure* means single in intention and action, without any mixture. To be pure in this way is to have *no pretense*. (v.8) **Whatever is (What Things are) Lovely** - Yet another governing aspect of such a life is “whatever is lovely.” The word *lovely* means “lovable, agreeable, endearing.” (v.8) **Whatever is (What Things are) Well-Spoken of** - This means whatever is of good repute, renowned, attractive, winning, and gracious. The Greek word means “sounding well.” (v.8)

If Any Virtue and Any Praise - Toward the end of 4:8 Paul changes his expression and says, “If there is any virtue and if any praise.” The Greek word for *virtue* here means excellence, that is, ethical energy exhibited in vigorous action. Praise refers to things worthy of praise, as the companion of virtue. The first six items are categorized as “whatever is” (what things are); the last two are categorized as “if any.” This indicates that the last two are a summing up of the six foregoing items, in all of which are some virtue or excellence and something worthy of praise. Virtue and praise are not two additional aspects, but values of the six aspects already mentioned. Virtue is a general term rather than a specific aspect. There is virtue in truthfulness, dignity, purity, loveliness, rightness, and being well spoken of. The principle is the same with praise: there is something worthy of praise in all these six aspects of the Christian life. In each of these excellent aspects there is some virtue and something worthy of praise. We should “take account of these things”; that is, we should think on them, ponder them, consider them.

The **Things Learned, Received, Heard, And Seen In The Apostle** - Not only should the believers think on the things mentioned in verse 8; they should also practice the things which they have learned, received, heard, and seen in the apostle.(v.9) To be sure, Paul lived in such a way as to express all the aspects listed in verse 8. Hence, the believers had learned of him, had received from him, had heard of him, and had seen certain things in him. For this reason, Paul charged them to follow him in practicing these things. Verse 9 closes with the word, “And the God of peace shall be with you.” This is both a blessing and a promise. The God of peace is the source of all the things mentioned in verses 8 and 9. By fellowshiping with Him and having Him with us, all these virtues will issue forth in our life. In verse 7 Paul speaks of the peace of God, and in verse 9, of the God of peace. First he says that the peace of God will guard our hearts and thoughts, then that the God of peace Himself will be with us. Actually the peace of

God and the God of peace are one. When God is with us, peace is with us also. The genuine peace we enjoy is God Himself. The way to enjoy the God of peace is by praying to have fellowship with Him.

Our Virtues Flowing Out of Christ Into Vessels - Paul does not mention kindness, patience, or holiness. Instead, he mentions six items which are governing aspects of a life that lives Christ. If we live Christ, we shall surely have a life that is an expression of all these aspects. In our living there will be no falsehood, looseness, or lightness. Instead, our living will be honorable, pure, right, lovely, and well-spoken of. Of the many, many Christian virtues, Paul selected these six as governing aspects. But all human virtues were created by God. According to Genesis 1:26, we were made in God's image. Our human virtues are a vessel made to contain the divine virtues, just as a glove is made in the image of a hand to contain the hand. The Bible reveals that the image of God is Christ (**Col. 1:15; 2Cor. 4:4**). Therefore, to say that man was made in the image of God means that he was made according to the form of Christ. Man was created according to Christ so that he could contain Christ and express Him. A glove is designed in the pattern of a hand so that it can contain the hand. Likewise, man was designed by God to bear the pattern of Christ. When Christ comes into a person, that person becomes a vessel containing Christ.

We are vessels to contain the glory of God. (**Rom. 9**) The glory of God denotes the expression of God, and this expression is Christ. Human virtues such as truthfulness, dignity, purity, and loveliness are all aspects of man as a vessel to contain Christ as the reality. On the basis of Paul's word, "To me to live is Christ" (**Phil. 1:21**), we can rightly say that the virtues in 4:8 are aspects of the expression of a life that lives Christ. Since Paul himself lived Christ, he certainly would not charge the saints to live something else instead of Christ. Therefore, the virtues he mentions in 4:8 must be the expression of the reality lived by Paul and by other saints. This reality is Christ Himself. Furthermore, in chapter two we see Christ as the pattern, and in chapter three, the pursuing of Christ with a view to gaining Him. In order to gain Christ, Paul counted all other things as refuse. How then could he exalt human virtues in chapter four? This is another indication that the virtues in this chapter are not something apart from Christ Himself. Rather, these virtues must be the very expression of the Christ lived by the believers. If we consider carefully the virtues listed in 4:8, we shall have to confess that there is no way for us to live such a life in ourselves. Therefore, we must go on to 4:13, where Paul says, "I can do all things in Him who empowers me." All the virtues in 4:8 are the expression of the very Christ in whom Paul could do everything. Based on the whole context of the book of Philippians, we can say that the six virtues in 4:8 are the expression of the living of Christ. These are not mere human virtues; but the expression of the very Christ whom we live.

If we did not have these verses in Philippians 4 concerning the expression of a life that lives Christ, we would not know what kind of life this is. The pattern of such a life was established by the Lord Jesus during the years He lived on earth. If you read the four Gospels carefully, you will see that the Lord lived a life absolutely outside religion, culture, and philosophy. Apart from the Lord Jesus, there has not been another person whose life was so pure and so free from the influence of religion, culture, and philosophy. In His living the Lord was wholly occupied by the Father. He was not occupied in the least by the elements of religion, culture, philosophy, habit, custom, and tradition. In His soul—in His mind, emotion, and will—there was no place for religion, culture, and philosophy. His entire inner being had been taken over by God the Father. Therefore, the Lord could live a life that was free of the influence of religious, cultural, and philosophical things. His life was the full expression of the divine life. This was the reason He could say, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father" (**John 14:9**), and, "The words which I speak to you, I do not speak from Myself; but the Father who abides in Me, He does His works" (**John 14:10**). In His living on earth, the Lord Jesus lived the Father and expressed Him. Today, we must live Christ and express Him.