Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Spiritual Stability, Part 6: Obedience
Scripture: Philippians 4:9
Code: 50-42

Let's open our Bibles this morning to the last message in our series on spiritual stability from Philippians chapter 4 verses 1 through 9. We have been addressing the question, How do we keep our spiritual balance in the face of tests and trials and weakness and temptation, persecution, doubt – all of the things that assail us in this life? That is really the matter before us again this morning. How can we be spiritually strong, spiritually firm? How can we experience peace, calm, quietness, confidence, a settled heart, comfort, contentment, in the midst of all of the stresses in our experience?

In Psalm 38, the Psalmist was under great stress. He says, "O Lord, rebuke me not in Thy wrath and chasten me not in Thy burning anger." He was feeling the chastening of God. He had fallen victim to temptation. His flesh had succumbed to the onslaught of evil, and now he was dealing with the guilt of sin and the combined punishment of God on top of that guilt. He says, "Your arrows have sunk deep into me, Your hand has pressed down on me." He was even beginning to feel it physically, "No soundness in my flesh," he says, "no health in my bones because of my sin." And then he begins to think about how serious his sin is. He says, "My iniquities are gone over my head; as a heavy burden they weigh too much for me. My wounds grow foul and fester because of my folly, I am bent over and greatly bowed down. I go mourning all day long for my loins are filled with burning and there's no soundness in my flesh."

He was feeling the pain of his sin, the guilt of his sin, he was feeling the punishment, the chastening of God as God was wounding him on top of his guilt, on top of his sinful anguish. In fact, it got to the point in verse 8 where he says, "I am benumbed and badly crushed. I groan because of the agitation of my heart." Verse 10, he says, "My heart throbs, my strength fails me, the light of my eyes," – that is joy – "even that is gone from me," there's no gleam in my eye anymore. And then to add to it, "My loved ones, my friends, my kinsmen stay away from me. I have no comforters, I have no counselors, I have no helpers. I have enemies" – verse 12 – "they seek my life. They try to injure me, they devise treachery all day long. I have no defense, so I stop my ears," he says, "and I don't defend myself; my mouth has no arguments" – verse 14.

Here is a man in deep distress from every angle. He is distressed because of his own sin. He is distressed because of the chastening of God. He is distressed because his friends are not coming to help him, he is alone and lonely and forsaken. He is distressed because he is attacked by enemies who seek to take his life. He is distressed, too, because he has no argument, for he knows his own

sinfulness. All he can do is pray. All he can do is cry out to God. And so in verse 9, he says, “Lord, all my desire is before Thee and my sighing is not hidden from Thee.” “You know my heart, Lord, You know what I’m going through, You know my pain, You understand it all.”

In verse 15, he says, “I hope in Thee, O Lord, Thou wilt answer, O Lord my God, for I said.” In other words, “I’ve prayed to You and I know You’ll answer.” And then in verse 21 he says, “Do not forsake me, O Lord, O my God, do not be far from me, make haste to help me, O Lord, my salvation.” Now, this is a man of God under great distress. Hated, he has enemies. He has friends who seem to be of little use to him in his time of need. He has fallen to the flesh. He is under the chastening hand of God. He is benumbed and badly crushed. His heart is agitated. He is unstable, to put it mildly. He is shaking. He is blowing around like a weed in a high wind.

This kind of instability can and is the experience of every Christian. And sometimes it can become so very severe that we lose touch with the ability to function in life. We can become so overwrought with anxieties and guilt and the hostility and persecution that comes from others and the lack of care and concern and love that comes or doesn’t come from friends that, literally, we lose our balance totally.

A book recently written by a well-known pastor begins like this: “I had visited Ward 7E many times. Its institutional yellow walls and highly polished floors resembled most of the psychiatric wards in mental hospitals where I had gone to minister to members of my congregation. There’s always a certain apprehension that lurks in the shadow of one’s mind while walking down those sterile, silent corridors. Behind each door is a different story. I’ve listened to them all, the criminally insane, the suicidal, the depressed, the alcoholic, the hostile, the addict, and then on many occasions I’ve tried to talk to those who had forgotten how to respond. I’ve never felt comfortable with the mentally ill. This time, however, my discomfort had been replaced by fear, my apprehension had given way to feelings of impending doom, the very atmosphere was charged with foreboding glimpses of the unpredictable. I was traumatized with humiliation and embarrassment. I was struggling against a creeping hostility waiting to overpower me. This time I was being led down the silent halls of Ward 7E not as a pastor but as a patient.

“For years, I had struggled to understand the unpredictable mood swings that could carry me from peaks of elation to the deep valleys of despair. I could preach with fervor and power. I could share Christ with enthusiasm and success. I would counsel with meaningful insight and socialize with sheer delight, but without warning, any or all of these positive and delightful emotions would suddenly be forced to give way to feelings of gloom and periods of weakness. I would withdraw and a form of paranoia would settle in. I would suddenly be overwhelmed with feelings of inadequacy and inferiority. On occasion, I toyed with thoughts of self-destruction,” end quote.

Can a pastor be benumbed and badly crushed? Can a psalmist be benumbed and badly crushed? Can you find yourself in such difficulty in life that you are crushed, that you’ve lost your spiritual

balance, that you've lost your equilibrium? Well, the answer is yes, apparently. The psalmist was. This pastor was. And all of us at times lose our spiritual balance. All of us at times find ourselves weak and unable to stand. Where do we go? Well, we must turn to the only one who is our deliverance, the only one who is our salvation, the only one who knows our hearts, the only one who understands our desires – and that is to God.

We must do that. And that is precisely where Paul wants to turn us in our text. And it is very important for us to find our spiritual strength and to find our spiritual stability because, you see, not only is spiritual instability intolerable in one's own life, for obvious reasons it takes our joy, but it is intolerable in one's own life because of how it affects others. You see, a spiritually unstable, benumbed and badly crushed believer is a contradiction in terms to a watching world of unbelievers who cannot understand how you can profess an all-sufficient God but then live as if your God was not sufficient.

That's a very important matter to consider. You see, we would all agree that people in our culture are much more interested in pragmatism than anything else. They're much more interested in results than truth. The convincing element of Christianity is not "Is it logical?" but "Does it work?" Not "Is it reasonable to believe in God?" but "Does God really change your life and provide strength for your weakness? Martyn Lloyd-Jones wrote: "Now, we believe that God extends His kingdom partly through His people, and we know that He has oftentimes done some of the most notable things in the history of the church through the simple Christian living of some quite ordinary people. Nothing is more important, therefore, than that we should be delivered from a condition which gives other people looking at us the impression that to be a Christian means to be unhappy, to be sad, to be morbid, and that the Christian is one who scorns delights and lives laborious days," end quote.

For our sake and the sake of the watching world who is assessing the validity of our message by how it works in our lives, we need to be spiritually strong. We are called to strength. We are called to stability. We are called to be unwavering. We are called to be immovable. We are called to be soldiers who, having done all, stand that we may be blessed, that we may know joy, and that the world may see the power of our God in our lives.

The question comes: How can we be like that? How can we stand strong? Paul addresses it in our text. Let's go back to our text, Philippians chapter 4. He desires that the Philippians be strong, that they be stable, that they be anxiety-free Christians, that all of their lives be guarded by the peace of God, that they experience calm and comfort and quietness and tranquility and contentment, that they demonstrate satisfaction. He desires that they be able to get along with humble means or to live in prosperity. He desires that in every circumstance, they know how to be filled or to go hungry. He desires that they know how to experience abundance or suffer need. And in all of this, in whatever state they're in, that they would be what? Content. That is the heart of their testimony, that they be living proof that "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." We are to be the living manifestation of the strength of Christ.

So writing to the Philippian church, he writes about spiritual stability. In the circumstances in which he wrote, he gives us a living illustration of it. At the time he writes, he is a prisoner in Rome, a prisoner in a private house, chained to a Roman soldier. Look at verse 1, our key phrase, “Stand firm in the Lord.” That’s the exhortation. Be spiritually strong, spiritual stable. The question is: How? How are we to do that? Now, we have already covered verses 1 through 8, we have only verse 9 remaining. But let me just quickly review.

There are a number of features, a number of elements, a number of requirements in spiritual stability. First of all, spiritual stability requires cultivating peace in the fellowship, we saw that in verses 2 and 3, peace. Secondly, we saw that spiritual stability involves maintaining a spirit of joy – verse 4 – rejoicing in the Lord always. Then in verse 5, we noted that spiritual stability requires learning to accept less than you are due. We talked about humility there. And then we noted in verses 5 and 6 that spiritual stability requires resting on a confident faith in the Lord – the Lord is near, so we’re not anxious. And then fifthly, we noted that spiritual stability requires reacting to problems with thankful prayer. Instead of worry, we pray with thanksgiving and thus experience the peace of God guarding our hearts and minds.

Now, we summed those up as five basic virtues. We said in order to enjoy spiritual stability, the believer must be characterized by peace, joy, humility, faith, and gratitude – peace, joy, humility, faith, and gratitude. Note this: Those are spiritual attitudes, okay? Godly attitudes – godly attitudes. Now, who produces in us godly attitudes? The Holy Spirit, the fruit of the Spirit. So when you live a Spirit-controlled life, the Spirit of God dispenses the peace, the joy, the humility, the faith, and the gratitude that one needs to maintain godly attitudes. The solution, you see, to anxiety, the solution to troubles and problems and guilt, the solution to hostility and loneliness, all of these things that are characteristic of life, the solution is right attitude. And the right attitude of peace, joy, humility, faith, and gratitude is produced by the Spirit of God, the fruit of the Spirit, in a believer who is filled by, controlled by the Holy Spirit.

All right. Then last time, we came to the high point, and we noted the sixth necessary element in spiritual stability, focusing on godly virtues or thinking on godly virtues. Verse 8 tells us that whatever is true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, of good repute – since there is excellence and since there are things worthy of praise, we are to let our minds dwell on these things. And we introduced the second characteristic of a spiritually stable individual, not only godly attitudes but godly thoughts – thinking patterns – thinking patterns. How you think is vital. And last Lord’s day, we talked in detail about a disciplined mind. You can keep all the fear and the worry and the anxiety and the depression at bay depending on how you think. If you think about what is true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, and of good repute, you will insulate your mind from those things which assault you. And so we talked about the mind and how the mind is to operate and on what the mind must focus itself.

And now we come to the final element – verse 9. The last point I want to make, the last feature in this list of elements necessary for spiritual stability is obeying God's standard. Now, listen to what I say. In order to be spiritually stable, you must have godly attitudes, godly thoughts, and the source for all those thoughts in verse 8 is the Word of God – we noted that last time – and then you must have godly deeds – godly behavior. You show me a life where there are godly attitudes generated by the Spirit of God, godly thoughts generated by the Word of God, and godly conduct and I will show you a spiritually stable person. That's Paul – that's Paul. You cannot divorce thinking from action.

One writer says, "All the countless concerns that burdened the Philippian Christian's mind could be kept at bay if they would continuously reckon up, think over, estimate aright, fill their minds with all things good and true and" – he says – "rise up and put into practice the demands of the Christian gospel." And that is precisely our final point. Thoughts can never be abstracted from action. Did you get that? Thoughts can never be abstracted from action. And that's the point we want you to focus on today. Look at verse 9. "The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things." Now, stop right there.

He is now calling for practice. The term "practice" in the Greek is prass. The verb would, in English, be P-R-A-S-S-O. It isn't the same as "do," the verb poie, which is a common verb, it is a verb which means repetition, action that is continuous. We talk about, for example, a lawyer having a practice, it means it's a constant way of life. A doctor has a practice. Different than practicing something. We say someone practices the violin or they practice tennis or whatever it might be. That's using the word in the sense of working on something to learn it. When we use it of a lawyer and a doctor, we hope that it means more than that. I think sometimes they are practicing on us in that sense. But when we say the doctor has a practice, we mean it is his practice to do that. It is his normal routine to live as a medical doctor. And that's the intent of the word prass.

Paul is saying this should be your practice. This should be your pattern of life, these things. And now, see, he's talking about how you conduct yourself. Godly attitudes – peace, joy, humility, faith, and gratitude. Godly thoughts – true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, and of good repute. And then godly practices – godly deeds. You see, spiritual stability finally comes down to the matter of living a life disciplined to obey God's standard.

I wish I could get this message across to this contemporary church culture. The reason people have so many problems, which literally overpower them and spin them off to all of the books and counselors and psychologists and psychiatrists and methodologies going and all of the formulas and so forth, the reason they do that is because they haven't properly assessed the fact that the inability to stand your ground and live a balanced, stable, Christian life is directly related to the absence of godly attitudes, godly thoughts, and godly practices. And how in the world is someone going to fix you? Because you're the only one who can fix those areas in the power of God. You're the one who

must walk in the Spirit that He might produce in you peace, joy, humility, faith, and gratitude. You're the one who must go into the Word of God and find there thoughts of true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, and good repute. You have to do it, and you're the one who must discipline your life to do what is right. You show me a person filled with the Spirit and, therefore, having godly attitudes, you show me a person in whom the Word dwells richly and so they have godly thoughts, you show me a person who lives an obedient Christian life, and I will show you a spiritually stable person.

You see, the first thing we must do is diagnose the problem at its root as a spiritual one. Now, I realize there can be some times some physical complications in our lives that debilitate us and foul up our thinking and things like that, but these are nonetheless spiritual problems. They must be dealt with in a spiritual way.

Let me give you a little perception. I was driving in this morning a little before 8:00 to church, and I noticed a guy coming the other way on the 5 Freeway really going fast. And right behind him was a black-and-white police car with the red light going and apparently – this guy was in the left lane and he was on the floorboard. Apparently, either he didn't know the policeman was behind him or he thought he'd just outrun him – or try – and went flying on by. Now, of course, preachers view the world as nothing but a series of sermon illustrations passing by, so it was not a large leap from that little event to something tied to this morning's message. If a policeman sees a crime about to be committed or sees someone violating the law, he arrests him. I mean that's what policemen are supposed to do. They're supposed to arrest people who break the law. That's their job. They don't try them and they don't sentence them, the courts do that. They just go find them and get them and arrest them.

And in a sense, that is exactly analogous to the principle that I want you to see here. When you have godly attitudes produced by the Spirit and godly thoughts produced by the Word, together they act as the policeman that arrests your flesh before it can commit the crime. You see, the flesh moves to disobey God's standard, and as it moves that way – because after all, it is the flesh – as it moves that way, the policeman arrests it, preventing it from committing a crime against the law of God. And, beloved, if your attitudes aren't godly, generated by the filling of the Spirit, and your thoughts aren't Biblical, generated by the Word of God, the policeman's not on duty. And if the policeman isn't on duty, he can't arrest anybody.

Have you ever seen something and said to yourself, "There ought to be a policeman here right now to take care of this"? Well, that's exactly the way it is in your spiritual experience. If there's no policeman to arrest your flesh, your flesh will violate the standards of God, your flesh will violate the law of God. It starts with right attitudes produced by the Spirit of God, right thoughts produced by the Word of God, which police the flesh and lead to right practices. That's why the practices don't come until verse 9. You have to start with the attitudes and the thought patterns.

You see, it's what Paul was talking about in 2 Corinthians 10 when he said the weapons of our warfare, you know, are not fleshly. If you try to use fleshly weapons against the flesh, it isn't going to help. The weapons of our warfare are spiritual. Spiritual attitudes and spiritual truth, spiritual thoughts, will bring everything captive to the obedience of Christ – 2 Corinthians 10:5. It's a great truth. It takes everything prisoner and pulls it down to the obedience of Christ. That's a great thought. You want godly attitudes and godly thoughts to take your flesh prisoner, don't you? And bring it captive to the obedience of Christ. And that's what Paul is saying here.

Sin in your behavior will produce spiritual instability. Sin in your practice will produce spiritual anxiety. However, purity in behavior will produce peace and stability. Isaiah 32:17 puts it this way: "And the work of righteousness will be peace always." Always. You show me a person living a pure, godly life, I'll show you a person experiencing what? Peace. And then it says in Isaiah 32:17: "And the service of righteousness produces" – implied – "quietness and confidence forever." Now, this is true not only in the millennial kingdom to come, where righteousness – the righteousness of Christ ruling in the world will bring peace, but it's true in your life. It is a truism. Righteousness produces peace. Righteousness produces quietness and confidence and "then my people," says Isaiah, "will live in a peaceful habitation." Righteousness produces peace.

It was at the cross where righteousness and peace met. It is the wisdom from above that is peaceable, the true wisdom. The righteous wisdom of God produces peace. James 3:18 says: "The seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace." At the cross, righteousness and peace kissed each other. Where there's righteous practice, there is contentment, comfort, calm, quietness, peace, tranquility, stability.

So the Philippians needed to continuously put into practice, to loyally conform to, to uncompromisingly embrace, and to allow their conduct to be habitually controlled by, the law of God. And, therefore, virtue conquers vice. Remember Romans 12:21? "Overcome evil with" – what? "With good." With good. So Paul's words are very direct. You've got to practice these things as a way of life. These things need to be your habit. This calls for discipline. I wish we had time to go into the whole matter of how to live a disciplined life, but it's the discipline of your life that creates the habits.

If I were to sort of describe spiritual growth from my own personal experience, I would see spiritual growth as the development of godly habits. In other words, as you grow as a Christian, you begin to notice that the habits of your life are right. The diminishing of the bad habits, the arrival of the good ones. And that's a matter of self-discipline by the power of God. As you discipline your life and begin to cultivate good habits, you get your life under control.

Now, let's look specifically at the verse and see what Paul is referring to. You have to practice, he says, you have to make habits of these things. What things? Verse 9: "The things you have learned

and received and heard and seen in me." My, this is a great statement. "The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me."

Now, where did a Christian in Philippi go to get information about how he was supposed to live? You say, "Well, he went to the Scripture." Yeah, but all he had was what? The Old Testament. The New Testament books were not yet brought together in a canon as we know it, or a canon in the sense – with one "N" – that is, a rule or a standard, the New Testament corpus, as it's called, or body of truth. That didn't happen for a long time. All of the New Testament books certainly weren't written at this time. They may have had access only to a very minimal amount of written revelation in the New Testament. It was in the future. So if they wanted to know God's standards for life, where did they go? They had to turn to whom? To the apostles.

Do you remember in the book of Acts it says that Peter preached on the day of Pentecost? Three thousand people believed and were baptized, and it says they continued daily in the apostles' doctrine. Why? Because that was the source of their truth until all these books were brought together. So before the composition of the New Testament and its full acceptance as authoritative Scripture, the standard of Christian belief and the standard of Christian behavior was embodied in the teaching and the example of the apostles. They were the persons who had the authority of Christ and who practiced the standards of Christ. That's why Paul says, "Be ye followers of" – what? – "of me as I am of Christ."

So what does he say now? You want to know how to live? You can't tell them to turn to the New Testament, it's not together yet. He says, "What you learned, received, heard, and have seen in me, do these things, practice this way." It's important to note, beloved, that the apostles really lived among the people. They ate with them, they slept with them, they lived with them. Because it was an utter essential that their life be totally, from start to finish, exposed to them so they would learn how to live.

Now, let's look at these four terms – learned, received, heard, and seen. Each of them highlights a very important aspect. The first word is the word "learned" and this comes from the Greek verb root for the word "disciple." And it has to do with the idea of teaching, instructing, discipling. The word mathts is a learner, one who receives instruction. So Paul here is referring to his personal instruction of them, sometimes preaching to the Philippians, sometimes teaching them in a formal class, sometimes conversing with them in a dialogue, sometimes discipling them one-on-one.

In Acts 20, it says that when he ministered, he went from house to house. Sometimes it was just talking with a family around their dining table. But he says, "All of the things that you have learned from me as I have taught you in many ways, publicly and from house to house" – as he said in Acts 20:20 – "practice these things – these things that I have taught you." This was instruction, expounding to them the Old Testament truths, expounding to them the meaning of the New Testament revelation which he had received from God, explaining to them how to apply it in their life – his personal

teaching exposition to them. Now, this was common.

By the way, in writing to Timothy, Paul even says in 2 Timothy 3:10, “You followed my teaching, my conduct, my purpose, my faith, my patience, my love, my perseverance, my persecutions, and my sufferings.” “You followed everything in my life” – that’s the only place Timothy could go to learn. So as Timothy was traveling with Paul, he just patterned his life exactly after Paul. Since he didn’t have a New Testament yet, he just patterned his life exactly after Paul. And that’s what the key function of the apostles was, not only to reveal truth but to live it so the early church would have a model to follow. And Paul, on a number of occasions says, “You’re to follow my pattern.” Back in chapter 3 of Philippians verse 17, he said it. “Join in following my example and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us.” “Follow my example and the example of people who follow my example.” That’s how it was in those days. They had to follow a human pattern.

So the first thing is: “You must practice in your life the things I taught you, the things you learned from me.” Then secondly, he says, “the things you received.” Now, some might say, “Well, he doesn’t mean anything different here, he’s just using another term. It’s a synonym.” Well, that could be. On the other hand, the word “received” has some interesting usages in the New Testament. And most commentators would agree that the word “received” can be used as a technical term for the revelation from God that came direct. And I would like to have us use it that way as we look at this verse. Paul, I think, has in mind here the received Word. Not what he taught them in explaining and expounding the Scripture, but what God gave him and he gave them, which was the Scripture which they received.

Just to show you how this term “received” is used and also a companion term, just a couple of illustrations. First Corinthians 11:1-2: “Be imitators of me just as I also am of Christ,” same concept. Then this: “Now I praise you because you remember me in everything and you hold firmly to the traditions just as I delivered them to you.” Now, here he’s talking about something different. He is saying, “Not only do you follow my example, not only do you listen to what I say, but you’re holding onto the tradition the same way I delivered it. I delivered something to you and you’ve received it.” And I believe there he has much more in mind, the very revelation of God.

In 1 Corinthians 15, he follows up with another very similar statement. He talks about the gospel in verse 1. “I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you which also you received.” Then he says in verse 3: “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received.” And then he goes in to that Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures He was buried, that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, that He appeared to Cephas then to the Twelve, and so forth. Now, I think he’s using a more technical term here. He says, “I want you to do what you learned from me,” very general, “everything I taught you,” which would include Scripture. But now he’s saying, “And I want you particularly to practice what you received. What God delivered to me I received, what I delivered to you, you received.” He’s talking about the treasure of Scripture, and I take it that we can use this in the technical sense, the received Scripture.

In Galatians 1:9, he says, “As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed.” Here he seems to be more directing his thought toward the revelation from God in actuality. Again in 1 Thessalonians chapter 4, “Finally, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus that as you received from us as to how you ought to walk and please God that you may excel still more.” And again, he’s talking about the revelation from God to him, from him to them, that became the treasure which they were to guard. As he said to Timothy in 1 Timothy 6:19-20, “Guard that treasure that was entrusted to you.”

So Paul is saying, “Look, I want you to practice in your life what I’ve taught you. I want to you to practice in your life what I’ve delivered to you of the Word of God itself. The Word and my comments on it, my instruction from it.” It’s basically what Paul has in mind when he says to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:2, “The things you received from me among many witnesses, the same commit to faithful men who shall be able to teach others also.” “You’ve received it, you pass it on.” “You received it from me, they’ll receive it from you, and they’ll deliver it to the next generation.” So he’s passing on the baton, as it were, of revealed tradition to be passed on again, so “what you’ve been taught in general” and “what you’ve been taught in specific revelation.”

Now, notice the third term he uses here is the term “heard,” “and what you’ve heard.” Some would suggest that it just means the same thing as learned and received – you’ve learned/you’ve received/you’ve heard is all the same thing. I think we would be better served if we really understand the care with which the Spirit of God chooses words, to assume that the word “heard” here now takes this discussion to another dimension. He’s already covered what he told them in “learned.” He’s already covered what God told them in “received.” And now I believe he is alluding to what they have “heard” from other sources than himself or God. In other words, “what you have heard about me and is true of me.” Because the word spread everywhere about this man, Paul. His reputation was impeccable. They had surely heard much from others about his ministry, about his character, about his lifestyle, about his preaching. And so he is not afraid that something has been exposed that isn’t right, so he just says, “what you’ve learned – that is, what I personally have given you; what you’ve received – that is, what God has transmitted through me to you by His revelation; and what you have heard about me from many sources. Practice these things.”

And then fourthly, he says, “And what you’ve seen in me.” Now, we’re coming to first-hand experience. Not what you heard from me, second-hand. Not what I gave you from God, third-hand. Not what you’ve heard from people around, fourth-hand or fifth- hand or whatever, but first-hand what you’ve seen. “You’ve seen my life, you’ve observed me. I’ve been with you, you’ve been with me. Practice these things.” Boy, what a consummate, consummate call to Christian duty. Everything you’ve been taught, everything that’s been revealed from God, everything you’ve heard to be true of my lifestyle, and everything you’ve observed in me, do it as a way of life.

He’s not embarrassed to say this because he knew his calling. Beloved, the apostles were called not only to walk with Christ, but they were called to be living models of New Testament Christianity before the early church. That was their calling. He modeled the standard. He had the peace, the joy, the humility, the faith, the gratitude. He thought on what was true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, and of good repute. He walked according to the revealed truth. And he says, “You’ve got to live like this. Follow me, I’m your pattern.”

When the New Testament came, obviously, it was written down. And now the pattern is the New Testament. But, may I hasten to add, that doesn’t mean that those who preach and teach and represent the New Testament are permitted to live any old way they like. I think some people think that. Just because we’re not apostles doesn’t mean that we’re not to be imitated as we follow Christ. Jesus said, you’ll remember, at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, talking about the man who built his house on a rock and a man who built his house on the sand. He said the man who built his house on a rock was like the man who hears the Word and acts on it, and the man who built his house on the sand is like the man who hears the Word and doesn’t act on it. Paul is saying practice what you’ve learned.

You remember what James said in James 1:22? “Be not hearers of the Word only but” – what? – “doers.” It’s the same concept exactly. It’s the same pattern exactly. “Practice these things that are true in my life. Practice the lifestyle that I live.” Why? “Because I’m living according to the revealed Word and Will of God,” that’s what Paul is saying. And we have to be able to say that, too. “Follow my life because I’m following the revelation of God.” “Follow my patterns, I’m following the revelation of God.”

And what is the promise attached to that? The end of verse 9, what is it? “And the God of peace shall be with you.” Now, God is the God of a lot of things. He’s the God of love, He’s the God of grace, He’s the God of mercy, He’s the God of compassion, He’s the God of all comfort, He’s the God of justice, He’s the God of power, He’s the God of light, He’s the God of life. He’s the God of a lot of things. Why does he say the God of peace? Because what’s he talking about here? He’s talking about spiritually strong, stable, firm, tranquil, content in the midst of difficulty. He’s talking about being adequate for life. He’s talking about being sufficient for all the difficulties. He’s talking about being able to do all things through Him who strengthens me. He’s talking about being content in anything and in everything. And that’s why he calls Him the God of peace. That’s why in verse 7, he mentioned the peace of God.

Now, follow this. If you have godly attitudes and godly thoughts and godly deeds, you will be guarded by the peace of God and the God of peace. What a tremendous statement. Therein lies your comfort, your tranquility, your calm, your quietness, your confidence. It was so real to him, so real to him, that he began to, I think, think of God very often as the God of peace. It means the God whose character

is peace and the God who is the giver of peace, the source, the origin of it. He began to think of God that way. Why? Because he was in endless trouble all the time. Read 2 Corinthians 11:23-33, always in difficulty, always in trying circumstances, always facing temptation, hostility, persecution, tests, trials, and so forth. And he had found God to be the God of peace. Why? The Spirit had granted to him godly attitudes, the Word had granted to him godly thoughts, and he had policed his life by those means to godly practices and so he knew the peace of God.

It became a favorite of his, and very often in his letters he refers to God that way. Romans 15:33, he says, “Now, the God of peace be with you all.” Twenty verses later: “And the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.” At the end of his second letter to the Corinthians, verse 11 of chapter 13: “And the God of love and peace shall be with you.” At the end of his first epistle to the Thessalonians, chapter 5 verse 23: “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely.” At the end of 2 Thessalonians chapter 3 and verse 16: “Now may the Lord of peace Himself continually grant you peace in every circumstance.” It became a favorite of his, the God of peace.

How can you know the God of peace and the peace of God? How can you be tranquil? How can you be calm in the midst of everything – temptations, onslaughts, doubts, fears, troubles? By living according to God’s pattern, by thinking according to God’s pattern, and by feeling according to God’s pattern – right attitudes, right thoughts, right action. You have to police your life, and your action ultimately will control your stability. That means you have to be disciplined. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, writing in his book, Spiritual Depression, gives this testimony. He said, “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 belong 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,” end quote.

We must be disciplined to add to our faith virtue – pure conduct, patterns of life, practices of righteousness. And this makes us able to be content in any circumstance and find the strength of Christ. That’s certainly my prayer for you. Let’s bow together.

Father, thank You for the good Word, the great holy and divine wisdom dispensed to us through this text and through the amazing life of Paul. Help us, Lord, to have those kinds of attitudes, feelings, those kinds of thoughts, those kinds of deeds which lead to spiritual stability. And, Father, when we are unstable and vacillating and when we’re benumbed and badly crushed, like the psalmist, and when our hearts are agitated, Lord, help us to do the inventory. How about my attitudes? How about my thoughts? How about my practices? And find there the problem and find in You the solution. Fill us with Your Spirit that we might feel the way we ought to, fill us with Your Word that we might think

the way we ought to, and use those two things to police our flesh that we might live the way we ought to in order that we might enjoy the peace of God and the God of peace. Give us that great, great benediction of Your peace. Amen.

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