

“Theology in Practice”
Philippians 4:9
(Preached at Trinity, August 20, 2017)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. As I’ve pointed out, Paul is drawing his letter to a close, but as he does so he divides it into several parts.
Verses 4-9 seem to be the logical close to the letter, but suddenly Paul inserts his great gratitude to them for their generosity – **Verses 10-19**.
Then, finally, he brings the letter to a close in **Verses 20-23** with his customary greetings and benediction.
2. As we’ve seen, in **Verses 4-9** Paul gives a bullet list of things to do; duties set before the Philippians as followers of Christ, all in the imperative: Rejoice, be gentle, don’t worry, pray with thanksgiving, think on good things, practice good deeds. These are duties for us as well.
3. As we come to **Verse 9** Paul concludes his list of imperative duties.
He uses the imperative form of the verb, πράσσω.
Philippians 4:9 NAU - "The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you."
4. This is the verbal form of the Greek noun, πράξις n. – activity or practice
5. Paul is setting forth a principle of great importance. In fact, it is at the heart of Christian discipleship. The principle is simply this:
CORRECT DOCTRINE WILL LEAD TO CORRECT BEHAVIOR – If it has truly been received.
John Calvin: “True doctrine is not a matter of the tongue, but of life; neither is Christian doctrine grasped only by the intellect and memory, as truth is grasped in other fields of study. Rather, doctrine is rightly received when it takes possession of the entire soul and finds a dwelling place and shelter in the most intimate affections of the heart.”¹
6. We use two theological terms to describe this principle.
Orthodoxy must lead to *Orthopraxy*.
 - A. Both terms begin with the word “Ortho” - ὀρθῶς – “straight” “correct” “right”
An orthodontist corrects or straightens teeth. An orthopedist straightens crooked limbs.
 - B. “Doxy” is from the word δοκέω – “think” or “believe”
Thus, orthodoxy means “right thinking” or “right belief.” We use the term to describe that which conforms to the historic creeds and confessions of the Christian church. It refers to correct doctrine.

¹ Calvin, John, *A Little Book on the Christian Life*, Translated by Aaron Clay and Burk Parsons, (Orlando: Reformation Trust, 2017), Pages 12-13.

- C. Orthopraxy, on the other hand is “right practice.” The point I want to draw from **Verse 9** is that right doctrine must result in right practice. It must be received into the heart.
7. Paul’s emphasis in this entire letter has not been to correct false doctrine but how true doctrine must shape how we live.
- I. There is danger of empty orthodoxy
- A. It is possible to believe all the right doctrine and be unconverted
1. James describes this danger
James 2:19-20 NAU - "You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. ²⁰ But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?"
 2. These would be those who have the right belief. Their theology is good and yet the outward expression of their life is unchanged. James is saying belief without practice is useless.
 3. Doctrine alone is insufficient
 - a. Paul knew well those who understood doctrine but remained hard hearted.
 - b. He spoke of those preaching in Rome
Philippians 1:15-17 NAU - "Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ even from envy and strife, but some also from good will; ¹⁶ the latter *do it* out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel; ¹⁷ the former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment."
 4. This can be a danger among reformed churches. Reformed theology can be very attractive to intellectuals. It is possible to embrace doctrine without falling in love with the God of the doctrine. Sound doctrine must instruct a person unto godliness.
- B. This is not to diminish the importance of doctrine
1. There is another damning error today that says doctrine is unimportant. They claim all you need is Jesus.
 - a. Is it possible to embrace the excellence of Christ and not know anything about Him?
 - b. How do you separate Him from the thousands of others by the same name?
 - c. How do you discern the true Christ from false Christs
 - d. What are the doctrines that are essential to the Gospel?
 2. Doctrine is the beginning. God cannot be known apart from the Divine revelation of Himself.
The Gospel begins with doctrine.
 3. Doctrine then leads to right practice

- C. This is always Paul's pattern. He begins with doctrine and then applies it to our lives.
1. In his Epistle to the Romans he spent the first 11 chapters explaining correct doctrine and then he spends the final 5 chapters describing right practice—orthodoxy followed by orthopraxy. **Chapter 12** begins: **Romans 12:1 NAU** - "Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship."
 2. In Ephesians Paul spent chapters 1-3 explaining right doctrine and then the final three chapters he presses right practice—orthodoxy followed by orthopraxy.
Chapter 4 opens: "Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called"
 3. Look at how Paul applies this in Titus 2. He moves from charging Titus to speak sound doctrine to applying the doctrine to life.
Titus 2:1-5 NAU - "But as for you, speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine. ² Older men are to be temperate, dignified, sensible, sound in faith, in love, in perseverance. ³ Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good, ⁴ so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, ⁵ *to be* sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, so that the word of God will not be dishonored."
The word for "dishonored" is βλασφημέω
KJV translates it "blasphemed."
 4. This has also been Paul's method in this epistle. In Philippians Paul continually wove a mosaic of doctrine/practice.
As we've seen, **Verses 4-9** contain series of imperatives, directives for the Christian to put into practice.
Then in **Verse 9** Paul closes with the praxis—the practice.
Philippians 4:9 NAU - "The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you."

II. What was Paul referring to when he says,
"The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me"

- A. First of all, Paul speaks of things learned and received
1. Paul was a ceaseless teacher. It was his life
 - a. This was his instruction to all who aspired to the Gospel ministry.
"Preach and teach the Word."
 - b. Paul told Timothy:
1 Timothy 4:13 NAU - "Until I come, give attention to the *public reading of Scripture*, to exhortation and teaching."

2. This is the work of the ministry
Philip Ryken – “Teaching the Word—this is as simple and clear a job description of the gospel ministry as there is. These days ministers are tempted to perform many other jobs. They have become salesmen, businessmen, musicians, entertainers, comedians, janitors . . . anything and everything except preachers. But a true minister is nothing more and nothing less than a minister of the Word. The center of any gospel ministry must be the exposition of Holy Scripture.”²
- B. Paul’s teaching, however, was never void of the consistent testimony of his life. “The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me”
1. Paul always lived out his doctrine. He was never afraid to say, “Follow my example.”
Philippians 4:9 NAU - "The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things"
Gerald Hawthorne rightly observes: “Paul believed that those who tell others to become Christians are obliged to show them what it is to be a Christian, Hence, because there always existed such a close connection between the word Paul preached and the life he lived he could say without embarrassment or arrogance: ‘Look to me! Follow my example! Imitate me.’”³
 2. What does Paul mean by “things?”
 - a. In the previous verse Paul had spoken of “things”
Philippians 4:8 NAU - "whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things."
 - b. I believe Paul has something broader in mind here. He’s referring to the things that pertain to the Gospel; the things that form the heart of our salvation.
1 Corinthians 15:1-2 NAU - "Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand,² by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain."
 - c. This was what Paul expressed back in **Chapter 1**
Philippians 1:27 NAU - "Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel;"

² Ryken, Philip Graham. *Reformed Expository Commentary, Galatians* (Phillipsburg, Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co.) Page 253.

³ Gerald Hawthorne and Ralph Martin, *Philippians*, Word Biblical Commentary, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2004), 43:253.

3. We must live consistently with those things that pertain to the Gospel. This has been the heart of Paul's teaching throughout this letter. This was the essence of Paul's teaching in the previous verse. We must live consistently with those things that are excellent and praiseworthy.
4. Christians are of a different sort. We are of a different realm. Paul said in **Chapter 3**
Philippians 3:20 NAU - "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ;"
 - a. Such people have different priorities
Paul says we must dwell on higher principles
Philippians 4:8 NAU - "if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things."
 - b. Such thinking changes everything. We must live consistently with what we believe. Orthodoxy results in orthopraxy
5. Paul demonstrated this in his own life—"Things heard and seen in me"
 - a. Paul said his chief focus in life was maintaining an upward focus:
Philippians 3:13-14 NAU - "Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of *it* yet; but one thing *I do*: forgetting what *lies* behind and reaching forward to what *lies* ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus"
 - b. Paul's word is, "You've seen it in my life. Practice it in your own life."
Philippians 4:9 NAU - "The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things,"
Philippians 3:17 NAU - "Brethren, join in following my example"
συμμιμητής, a form of the word μιμητής – imitator (we get our word mimic)

Conclusion:

1. The Christian life is unique. Most people upon this earth have their minds firmly fixed on earthly things. Paul laments that their end is destruction.
 - a. Christians on the other hand have their minds fixed on higher things.
Philippians 3:20 NAU - "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ;"
 - b. Such people are to set their minds on lofty things.
Philippians 4:8 NAU - "if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things."
2. We've been raised with Christ to a life that transcends this world, and yet we remain in fierce warfare as long as we live.
3. As we go through the battles we are promised the peace of God will keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Paul also reminds us that the God of peace will be with us through every step.