

FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH

www.ffbic.org

SERMON: *Sharing Secrets*

SERIES: *Letter from a Roman Prison*

SCRIPTURES: *Philippians 4:8-20*

SPEAKER: *Shaun Kipe*

DATE: *2021 - 10 - 24*

**Credit to Bruxy Cavey, Dallas Willard, Moises Silva for incredible insights related to this sermon!*

Well good morning and welcome to Five Forks Church this morning.

We are in the final week of a series called, “**Letter from a Roman Prison.**” Taking a look in detail at Paul’s letter to the Philippian church, and trying to understand some of the background and then asking the question “So what?” Why does this matter for us today?

Today we’ll be finishing up, looking at Philippians 4:8-20.

So if you have a Bible go ahead and open there with me, let’s see what Paul has for us today...

I. Philippians 4:8-20

A. Good thinking

⁸ Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.

There are several classic memory verses in our text for today and this is one of them. Two things I want to point out related to this verse.

First, something most of us would not realize, is that this list of characteristics, seems to be a list of

1. Greco-Roman virtues.

Several of the words listed here, are not typical words that Paul uses in his writings. You know how each of us have our own personal unique “jargon.” Paul does as well, and it appears as if he borrowed some these words from his secular world.

Now, why does that matter, well it’s a good reminder that a Christ follower should learn to discern and even affirm: ideas, philosophies, practices and movements within the larger culture that are in line with Jesus teaching.

New Testament scholar, Ben Witherington III says, **“Paul is calling for Christians to be sifters, not rejecters of their larger culture.”**

Paul looked around at his world and noticed something that was good and beneficial (this list of virtues) and he affirmed it.

It reminds me of a phrase that one my professors at Messiah used to use: “All truth is God’s truth.” If it’s true, good, right, noble, pure, lovely then we can affirm it, it has it’s source in God.

I think sometimes as Christians it’s easy for us to be critical about the world around us. *“Everything is evil. The world is gonna contaminate you.”* And we end up separating ourselves from the world, so much so at times, that we lose our ability to even connect with the larger society. We can come across as out of touch with the real world.

And I will tell you as “BICer’s” we have sometimes struggled with this very concept. In our efforts to not become “worldly” we ended up rejecting “good things” in the world.

This is a problem. Because, Jesus talks about his followers no mostly as separatists, but as salt and light. (Matthew 5). In order for salt to be effective it has to enter the dish. In order for light to be effective it has to enter the darkness. (CAVEY)

Now, that doesn’t mean that everything out there in culture is good, true, right. We’re gonna talk about that in just a moment. We know that’s not the case. But it does mean we don’t need to reject everything in culture. We sift and discern our culture through the lens of Jesus and his teachings.

Matthew 10:16 - ¹⁶ “I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.

In fact, if we are able to recognize truth, beauty and goodness within the larger culture, this allows us to open up conversations and create points of connection with people outside of the church.

Second,

2. Thinking influences behavior.

You can slice it any way you want, but what you allow into your mind will influence your thoughts, your opinions, your ideas, your character...the person you become.

“What is in you, will come out of you.” (Ortberg) “You reap what you sow.”

Psychological studies done on this concept: *Students who surround themselves with more studious roommates tend to study more. Diners who sit next to heavier eaters,*

tend to eat more. People who live next door to neighbors who garden, end up mowing their lawn more often.

What you choose to feed your mind, will come out in your behavior.

This concept is all over Paul's writing.

Romans 12:2 - ² Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is...

Colossians 3:2 - ² Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.

Dallas Willard is, in my opinion one of the greatest Christian theologians of our generation. He has a wonderful book about what transformation into Christ-likeness requires called "Renovation of the Heart." I would recommend this book to every serious follower of Jesus. Here's what he says about the importance of our thinking in relation to our behavior...

"seductive ideas and images will work, consciously and unconsciously, to our harm. The result of allowing the world free, unfiltered access to our minds is "mental turmoil or bondage...[for] nothing enters the mind without having an effect for good or evil"

Fill your mind with violence, greed, lust, anger...it will have an impact on the kind of person you become.

Hang out with me long enough, you'll likely start to pick up some of my habits.

Hang out with Jesus long enough, you'll likely start to pick up on some of his habits.

Therefore, we must learn to **focus our minds on God's thoughts, attitudes, and actions—reflected perfectly in flesh by Jesus of Nazareth (Col. 1:27). As we do, our brains are rewired over time to increasingly understand, value, and behave as citizens of Christ's Kingdom.** (Willard)

And you see, folks, in an information age...where you can put so many images, data, games, movies, and social media posts in front of your thinking instantly and all day long...this is so important. What do you allow your mind to soak in?

We were talking about this concept at our weekly sermon meeting and someone said, this seems to be why we are living in an angry nation right now. Many of us, are soaking in, wallowing in information, data, news that comes to us in an angry tone. We are all feeding off of that anger. It's making us into an angry and divided people.

Paul would say, "don't tell me you can read whatever you want, listen to whatever you want and look at whatever you want and follow whatever you want" and soak it in without being discerning and it won't impact who you become. **Want to live like Jesus? You must have his life, teachings, example regularly soaking in your thoughts.**

Let's continue...and talk a little about...

B. Sharing secrets

Philippians 4:10 - ¹⁰ I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. ¹¹ I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. ¹² I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.

Couple of words in here that are pretty significant to understanding what Paul is saying...

Secret is a word that in the first century comes from **gnostic initiation rites**.

Gnosticism was a form of pagan spirituality that separates the spiritual realm from the physical realm. And that the physical/material realm is seen as evil and the spiritual realm is good. Much first century Biblical writing is combating Gnosticism.

Now, Gnostics thrive on secrecy. Gnostic spiritual groups had initiation rites, where new members learned “the secret” or the hidden knowledge. Secret hand shakes, secret knowledge, secret codes, etc.

The problem is that this kind of secrecy, separates the world into **us** and **them** categories. Those who know the secret and those who don't. And don't tell the people on the outside. Join the group and then we'll tell you the secret.

And this has a pull on our psyche, doesn't it. You want to be part of the in-group.

You know how when something is a secret, you want to know what the secret is. Can I take you back to the beginning of the service. We played a mean trick on you. Pastor Bill stopped me in the middle of this stage and obviously whispered something in my ear. And what was your immediate thought? “I wonder what he said. I want to know the secret. I want to be part of the in-group.”

What if I say, “Sorry I can't tell you, it's our secret.” How do you feel? Now you want to know even more. So, I'll put you at ease, “Pastor Bill said, no time limit this morning Shaun you can preach as long as you want.” I'm just kidding. He didn't actually say anything to me, we just wanted to help you feel the power of secrecy. Us vs. them.

Gnostics thrive on this secrecy and the in-group, out-group mentality.

So, Paul uses this gnostic word...borrows their idea... He finds a concept they are familiar with and uses that as his entry point to connect with them. He's says, I've learned the secret...and usually its backed up with...now all you have to do is come and join my little group and then we'll tell you to.

But what's fascinating is that's not what Paul does. Instead, he says I've learned the secret and then he goes on to plainly state what it is.

Let's all imagine for a moment going back to 1980...the first Star Wars movie (**IMAGE OF MOVIE COVER**), Episode IV was a massive success. And in 1980, the second Star Wars movie (**IMAGE OF MOVIE COVER**), Episode V is going to be released. And everyone says, "oh man wait until you see this movie, there is a huge secret revealed. It's gonna blow your mind. Nobody predicted this." (Now if you haven't seen the movies or if you've been living under a rock, I'm about to spoil the movies for you ok?) The secret revealed is that the central villain in the movie, Darth Vader (**IMAGE OF BATTLE SCENE BETWEEN LUKE AND VADER**)...is revealed as the father of the central hero...Luke Skywalker. An epic battle scene, where Luke is trying to destroy Vader and Darth Vader says, "No, I am your father..." (Gasps)...

Now imagine going to the theater in 1980...they had theaters back then, right? Imagine going, anticipating some secret being revealed. And when you arrive there is some knucklehead walking around, outside the theater, shouting out "Hey everyone, Darth Vader is Luke's dad!" "Darth Vader is Lukes dad!"

In Philippians, Paul is kind of like that guy, he's running around blabbing the secret for everyone. He let's everyone in on it. Everyone can be part of the in-group.

I've learned the secret...What secret?

The secret of contentment.

Now this another interesting word. The word Paul uses here is a word he borrows from **stoic philosophy**. Not gonna get into the details on stoic philosophy.

But when the stoics used this word, contentment, they meant **“self-sufficient”**...a self-sufficient person is a content person. *“I have learned to not rely on anyone or anything.”* (CAVEY) I would say some of that stoic mindset still exists in our world today.

“We pride ourselves in self-sufficiency.” I can do it on my own. There are some parents of young children out there who would probably like to agree with this definition of contentment? If my kids do everything on their own, I would be content.”

Paul borrows this word...Paul speaks to stoic philosophy and gnostic spirituality. I’ve learned your secret, I’ll plainly tell you and I have learned how to be completely self-sufficient.

How Paul? What is the secret to contentment? Look at verse 13. Another classic bumper sticker verse...

What does Paul say (verse 13)? **“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”**

The secret is to be completely dependent on Jesus. This is the secret sauce of life. Self-sufficiency for a Christian means complete dependency upon Jesus!

Now this phrase, this verse can so easily be taken out of context. Paul is not saying, especially if you’ve been here with us following along on this letter. He’s not saying, “If you follow Jesus. He’ll give you that promotion at work. He’ll find you a job that

makes you lots of money. He'll help you become a professional athlete. He'll keep you from harm and sadness. He'll keep you from disease. He'll make all your dreams come true. He'll make "that person" fall in love with you."

We know Paul is not talking about Jesus changing your circumstance into all the things you want. Because Paul has just said, in plenty or in want, no matter the circumstances.

What he's saying is that in Jesus, your dreams, your aspirations, your values, your character actually begin to change. You take on the character and life of Jesus, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness...no matter the circumstances.

In some ways you could call this the punch of Paul's entire letter. If you get nothing else from this series...Paul says **the secret to contentment in life is: Knowing, loving and following Jesus.**

This is perhaps why his final section is so important for an affluent society such our own that is so driven by wealth, comfort and prosperity...

C. Prosperity theology...

Philippians 4:14-23 - ¹⁴ Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles.

¹⁵ Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; ¹⁶ for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid more than once when I was in need. ¹⁷ Not that I desire your gifts; what I desire is that more be credited to your account. ¹⁸ I have received full payment and have more than enough. I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a

fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. ¹⁹ And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.

The letter to the Philippian church was motivated by money, financial support. As Paul has been out doing the work of sharing the story of Jesus...the Philippian church has supported him financially and Paul is thanking them for their support.

Sometimes people will read these words, particularly in verses 18-19 and say, “*See it says if I give and am generous, then God will give me gifts.*” This is the mentality behind “prosperity theology.” But this is a misunderstanding of how God views riches.

For God to supply your needs according to his riches in Jesus is not monetary wealth going in your pocket. But rather, in the same way that Paul redefines secret and contentment...God redefines riches.

What does Jesus tell the rich young ruler? “Sell all you have and follow me.”

What does Jesus say when the cheating tax collector Zacchaeus gives away much of his wealth “Salvation has come to this house.”

What does Jesus say in his own sermon? “Do not store up treasure on earth...”

Prosperity theology is simply settling for second best. It’s like going back to the scubala we talked about a couple of weeks ago, left-overs, garbage...compared to knowing Christ Jesus.

Let us be careful not to get caught up tying our faith in Jesus to prosperity and comfort.

Ok, we’ve made it to the end...let’s just finish up with some practical applications. A couple from today’s passage and also a couple more general applications from the entire series.

II. So what?

From today's passage...

A. Giving is a form of worship.

Money has always been a touchy subject in the church. It was back in the early church and it still is today. But it's not something to be avoided.

Did you catch this phrase in verse 18? Paul says, "Your giving is **a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.**

In Christian circles we tend to think of worship as group singing. But we must recalibrate how we understand our worship.

It's not the first 20 mins of the service when we sing. That's part of it...but it's whole-hearted. For Paul it's all-encompassing. Remember we don't separate our spiritual lives from our physical lives like gnostics.

When we focus on the words of the message/scripture that's honoring to God and is worship.

When we give our tithes/offerings...that's worship.

When we take what we've learned in here and apply it in our lives out there...that's honoring to God it's a form of worship.

Worship is our entire life-style, dedicated to Jesus. Rightly understood our giving is an act of worship, not about getting something back from God.

This is a sign of maturity as a follower of Jesus. That I begin to recognize that everything, my singing, my resources, my talents, my attitudes are all an act of worship. Not just my hour on Sunday.

B. Language of the church can borrow from secular paradigms.

(CAVEY)

Remember we are sifters of our culture not rejecters of our culture.

Sometimes people will ask me, How come you quote from a non-biblical or even non-Christian authors in some of your sermons?

Part of the answer is that, biblical authors (like Paul), do this regularly and submit that truth to the truth of Christ.

Where true we can affirm our culture. Where not true we can redefine. It's not worldly to do this and often creates points of connection with the un-churched.

C. Less focus on who's in and who's out and more focus on Jesus.

In the same way that Gnostic spirituality emphasized secret knowledge and created "in-out groups", I wonder if we, church people, today are in the habit of creating an "in-out" "us-them" culture.

And so we tend to draw these lines, borders...to separate ourselves and draw distinctions.

But as one author says, *"The Gospel does not thrive on us patrolling our borders, making sure that everyone thinks the same way we do. In Jesus kingdom, we don't find our identity by patrolling the borders, but rather by turning our backs on the borders and focusing on the Jesus at the center. In Christianity the borders actually become a little fuzzy...who's exactly in and whose exactly out anyway?"* (Cavey)

Because it's not up to me to judge. It's up to God. He's just fine doing it without my help.

What I do is focus on Jesus and invite others to come and **focus on Jesus with me**. I really think that if we could sum up Paul's letter this is what he would be encouraging the Philippian church.

Back when our youngest son Keagan was really young, 2 years old. He was in the 2 year old Sunday school class with Mrs. Bonnie. And they always used to sing this song in there called "building up the temple." You know this song...all our kids loved it and sang it. And Keagan really loved it. He would come home from church often singing away at this song. You would catch him, sitting there playing by himself singing this song. But he adapted the words...to include another line, he added a punch line to the song...in fact we caught him on video, without him realizing...it's one those cute videos of him as a kid...check this out...

VIDEO OF KEAGAN...

He loves Jesus, he's still working on that part about loving others, like his sister...but did you catch the line.... "building up the temple, building up the temple...Because I love Jesus. Building up the temple...just because I love Jesus.

I think Paul would say, live your life, give your life, find the secret of life and that is to live each every moment, each and every interaction, face each and every trial, each and every frustrating person...singing in your heart...because I love Jesus."

Alright...two final applications from the series at large...

D. Never read a Bible verse. Always read Bible verses.

Let me explain.

Far too often we Christians take a Bible verse and use it out of context. It's just not helpful. Philippians is full of bumper sticker Bible verses. But if you really want to understand the cliché verses in Philippians you need to read larger portions to understand what Paul is saying in context.

We get ourselves in trouble when we don't. We're not being faithful to the text.

I hope that through this series you have learned the importance of learning the larger context.

Finally...in good Brethren in Christ fashion...I hope you have learned that...

E. All good bible study should move us beyond information to right actions.

⁹ Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

Jesus said, at the every end of own sermon, **“Whoever hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wiseman...”**

Paul in this letter has been teaching theology, it is rich in good Bible verses to memorize. But always to push that theology into application. **Every time you open Scripture, you should be asking how does this change the way I get up in the morning? How will this help me to live differently...attitude and actions?**

(CAVEY)

If you're just trying to gain biblical knowledge and understanding...and that's where it stops...you're not following the pattern of the Bible itself. The writers of the Bible always intend for this to become a pattern of life. A life-style.