

Lessons Paul Learned

Introduction. No one wants to be old, nor do they unfortunately want to listen to those who are old. But there is great value in listening to lessons learned by those who have lived a full life with its experiences. This is one reason why we should honor those who are older (Leviticus 19:32; Proverbs 16:31).

Today we are going to listen to the voice of the apostle Paul who had many experiences and was in an incredibly difficult part of his life — confined in prison.

I. Paul Learned To Be Happy (Philippians 4:4)

- A. In all the twists of life, whether in attacks from errorists, persecution from the world, threat of imminent death, or just personality clashes among Christians, we are to maintain a spirit of joy in the Lord.
- B. We are not immune to sorrow, nor should we be insensitive to the troubles of others; yet we should count God's will our highest joy and so be capable of knowing inner peace and joy in every circumstance (Isaiah 61:10).
- C. Lasting happiness is a choice; it is not a fleeting emotion. It is a result of a sense of mental satisfaction based on a proper association with God (Proverbs 16:20; 29:18; Romans 5:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:16).
- D. It is a privilege to know that the Lord's promises are true and that He does not change (Hebrews 13:5, 8). With this, a Christian can always be happy.
- E. Believers are to show "moderation" to all. Involved is the willingness to yield one's personal rights and to show gentleness to others. It is easy to display this quality toward some persons, but Paul commands that it be shown toward all.

II. Paul Learned To Depend On God (Philippians 4:6)

- A. Paul had to trust God to get him through life's troubles.
 1. Christians should pray instead of be "anxious". This verb can mean "to be concerned about" (Philippians 2:20), but here the meaning is clearly that of anxiety, fretfulness, or undue concern (Matthew 6:25-34).
 2. Paul is not calling for apathy or inaction, for as we make plans in the light of our circumstances, it is our privilege to do so trusting that our Father hears us (Matthew 6:8). He uses three words to describe our
 - a) The answer to anxiety is "prayer", a word that denotes the petitioner's attitude of mind as worshipful and reverent.
 - b) "Supplication" denotes prayers arising from a specific need.
 - c) "Thanksgiving" should accompany all prayer, as the supplicants acknowledge that whatever God sends is for their good. It may also include remembrance of previous blessings.
 3. Paul saw prayer as the fitting human response to every conceivable situation that might arise in life.
 - a) Human disappointment (1 Samuel 2:1-10).
 - b) Spiritual growth (Philippians 1:9-11).
 - c) Conscientious struggle (Psalm 51:1-4).
- B. The consistent divine promise is that you can trust God (Psalm 37:5; Proverbs 29:25; Ezekiel 36:37; Acts 27:25; 2 Timothy 1:12; Hebrews 4:16).

III. Paul Learned Peace Of Mind (Philippians 4:7)

- A. He learned the secret that all men and women search for: peace of mind (Colossians 3:15).
 - 1. Paul attaches to this classic exhortation to pray the beautiful promise that when we turn from anxiety to prayer and thanksgiving, God will give us His own “peace”. This peace is what is felt when we have no anxious care about the supply of our wants, and when we confidently commit everything to the hands of God (Psalm 17:8; 36:7; 91:4).
 - 2. This peace is for those who are already at peace with God through justification by faith in Christ Jesus (Romans 5:1; Ephesians 2:14).
 - 3. This peace of God “transcends all understanding” or it “exceeds anything we can understand” — it is certainly sufficient for us. It is a peace that is nowhere else to be found. “Keep” is a military term picturing soldiers standing on guard duty, referring to the guarding of the city gate from within as a control on all who went out. The peace of God guards our hearts and thoughts from all anxiety and despair.
- B. Jesus promised peace of mind for His people (John 14:27; 16:33). Peace is the presence of God, not the absence of conflict.

IV. Paul Learned To Think About The Good In Life (Philippians 4:8)

- A. Paul learned the value of filling his mind with wholesome thoughts.
 - 1. Christians should keep on thinking and doing what is morally and spiritually excellent. This involves centering minds on exalted thoughts and then putting into practice what they have learned from Paul’s teaching and example.
 - 2. Paul sets forth a veritable charter of virtues for Christian thought:
 - a) “True” has the sense of valid, reliable, and honest — the opposite of false. It characterizes God and should characterize Christians (Romans 3:4).
 - b) “Honest” denotes a quality that makes people worthy of respect (1 Timothy 3:8, 11; Titus 2:2). The word implies something that is majestic, dignified, and awe-inspiring.
 - c) “Just” refers to what is upright or conformable to God’s standards and thus worthy of His approval.
 - d) “Pure” emphasizes moral purity and includes in some contexts the more restricted sense of “chaste”. In the LXX it signifies ceremonial purification.
 - e) “Lovely” relates to what is pleasing, agreeable, or amiable.
 - f) “Good report” denotes what is praiseworthy, attractive, and true to the highest standards.
 - g) Suddenly Paul changes the sentence structure to conditional clauses, a rhetorical device that forces each reader to exercise his or her own discernment and choose what is “virtuous” and “praiseworthy”.
- B. Thoughts frequently form the subject of warning in the Scriptures (Psalm 19:14; Isaiah 55:7; Romans 12:1-2; 2 Corinthians 10:5). The thoughts of the heart reflect the true reality of the person (Proverbs 23:7). Paul knows that when we concentrate on these thoughts, we will be faithful.

Conclusion. Paul could have grown bitter, like many people who have had so many bad experiences in life, but he did not. He learned how to grow closer to God. May it be that we learn as much, especially those who are early in life.