



THE POWER OF A GOD-SHAPED ATTITUDE Philippians 4:8-9

The distinguished United Methodist pastor, Dr. James W. Moore, has written a delightful book entitled: **ATTITUDE IS YOUR PAINTBRUSH: It Colors Every Situation.**

Dr. Chuck Swindoll reinforces this biblical principle when he writes “The longer I live - the more I realize the **impact of attitude** on life. I am convinced that life is 10% what happens to me - and 90% how I react to it.” I would go further and say the most important element is what we allow to happen **inside of us**. At the Case New Holland corporate office there is a picture in bold - dark - large letters sharing: **ATTITUDE IS EVERYTHING.**

You and I won't go very far in our journey of faith until we discover that the power of the Holy Spirit helps us adopt and maintain Christ-like attitudes needed to live out the Christian faith. It is easy to allow our soul and spirit to be depressed - downcast - full of despair - unless we are supplied and sustained by a power source beyond us. It is easy to allow the wrong colors to dominate our lives. The motivational speaker Zig Ziglar shares, “It is not the hardening of the arteries which is the most deadly disease - **it is the hardening of the attitude** - which is the most deadly disease to the Human Spirit.” Our lesson today from Holy Scripture confirms this truth.

You and I are now living at a time in which we have access to more information and data than at any other moment in the history of humankind. However the question is always: What will we do with all this knowledge? Having knowledge and information does not necessarily guarantee a wise or holy people. The Apostle Paul wrote in **I Corinthians 13:2**, “**If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and knowledge and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.**”¹

I think what the Apostle Paul is trying to teach us is that it is easy for information to become an end in and of itself. How do we filter the information that bombards us in life?

Recently an article by Mart De Haan of the Radio Bible Class came across my desk asking the question: Are you an idealist or a realist? In the world of art – realists paint life with warts – blemishes – and scars. Idealists paint a subject as they imagine it could or should be. Marty shares – and I agree – both perspectives are important. Ideals give us **direction**. Realism gives us **traction**.²

Paul in our lesson gives us direction. He writes “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.”

Yet you and I know we live out these ideals in a fallen world – with fallen people – where everything is not noble or lovely. Yes, we need direction – but also traction as the people on Routes 78 and 81 discovered this past week.

If you are looking for the perfect spouse – the perfect church – the perfect child – you will always be discouraged. When I was sharing the thrust of this sermon with someone this week, I said, “I have the perfect wife.” (idealism) Just what did Saint Mary say? She said, “Boy, I wonder what he is after.” (realism)

Jim Blanshine shared with me last week after the service a story by Dr. Norman Vincent Peale, whom he had heard preach in New York City. It seems that Dr. and Mrs. Peale often rode in taxi cabs in New York City – a religious experience in itself. He told how they got into a cab one day and Dr. Peale said, “Can you smell that?” Mrs. Peale said, “Yes, I can. It actually smells clean and nice.” The cab was clean.

The cab driver was a born again Christian – and he served God and the public by having a clean, good smelling cab. A rare commodity. He had a God-shaped attitude.

For many years I have received a monthly publication and other writings from Dr. Norman Vincent Peale. Now Dr. Peale never taught that we are saved by positive thinking – but people who have experienced the gift of salvation – do think positively. Basically, Dr. Peale taught that what we think is what we become. Our thoughts greatly shape our behavior. **Isaiah 26:3** clearly teaches, “You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast (or staid on) Thee.”

Dr. William Barclay says, “...it is a law of life that, if a man thinks of something often enough and long enough, he will come to the stage when he cannot stop thinking about it. His thoughts will be quite literally in a groove out of which he cannot jerk them. If a man’s thoughts are in the Lord and His word then he will literally walk in that way or groove.”

T. S. Eliot was right on target when he wrote: **Where is the wisdom we have lost in our quest for information and knowledge?** This is a warning to us. We can have the best-organized church in town - and do absolutely nothing of importance for God. Our church is also a big brick building. How is the information that we learn here any different from all the other brick buildings in town? Do we share information just for the sake of sharing information or do we share information to usher people into the transforming presence of Jesus Christ?

As we continue in our study of Paul’s letter to the Philippian congregation that he cherished so tenderly - we come to **verses 8 and 9** of the fourth chapter. Today we see again that Paul practices and lives out what he preaches and writes about to us.

This is why we should always give serious consideration to the words of Paul as inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Twice in my life I have stood at the exact place where the Apostle Paul was placed in jail. It would have been easy for Paul's life to have been colored blue with despair - rather than radiate with the power of faith. It would have been easy for Paul to have a hardened heart because of his less than advantageous circumstances. (realism) However because Paul has a God-shaped and focused attitude - it makes all the difference in the world. (idealism) He simply trusted that God was always at work - and allowed **this attitude** - to govern his life and work.

Paul knew that we cannot separate ourselves from our attitude anymore - than we can separate ourselves from our shadows. For good - or for bad - the attitude we currently possess accompanies us everywhere we go. It helps to shape who we are in the most profound of ways. Paul knew because of human sin - everyone of us has an attitude problem in some way. This is why in **Philippians 2:5** Paul instructs us "**Your attitude should be the same as that of Jesus Christ.**" Paul discovered that one's attitudes had an impact upon both our eternal destination - and our everyday life. The only thing Paul could control was his attitude. Just drive on Route 30 for a five mile stretch - attitude is everywhere. I have heard some of you say T. O. has an attitude.

One of the most significant books - besides the Bible that I read as an undergraduate was entitled: **MAN'S SEARCH FOR MEANING** by Dr. Victor Frankl. Dr. Frankl was an Austrian psychiatrist who lived through the horrors of Hitler's concentration camps as a younger man. During this part of his faith journey he discovered "We who lived in the concentration camps can remember the ones who walked through the huts comforting the sick and giving away their very last piece of bread. These folks offered living proof that everything can be taken from us but one thing: the last of our human freedoms - **to choose one's attitude** in any given set of circumstances - to choose one's way."³ This is what the Apostle Paul was getting at in our lesson.

I hope you heard the good news in this insight. You and I cannot change the course of the stars or other things like the size of our ears or feet given by birth - but we can change our attitudes - and thereby change our lives. This is the great freedom God gives to us all. What does your attitude free you to love? What attitude is shaping our preparation for Easter?

This power to choose set the Apostle Paul free to love and serve God in all circumstances. He did not allow the hardening of his attitude - to block the good work and power that God wanted to flow from his life to others. Most attitude problems come about when we are focused in on the wrong direction - person - or thing in our lives.

When we are possessed by a bad attitude the Bible is not the only thing we discard. Even the almighty computer and its system of communication and languages can be infected by a deadly virus that can shut down the operation. A poor attitude - or an attitude not shaped by God and faith in Christ - can shut down the operation of life and fill it with a deadly virus as well. You encounter attitude everywhere - just be sure which attitude you engage your life with.

Many in this church today - especially those 50 years and older - probably remember the name of John D. Rockefeller. His story clearly reveals the importance of a God-shaped attitude for a healthy purpose in life and for life.

Early in his life he believed the main purpose for life was to get and to achieve as much wealth and material possession as possible. If he could do this - he would be happy - and people would respect him. At age 33 he earned his first million - and by age 53 he became the world's first billionaire.

However at age 54 Mr. Rockefeller was given a year to live. He developed an illness called "alopecia" in which he lost his hair - suffered from insomnia and could only eat a diet of crackers and milk. He earned a million dollars a week and could literally fly to the finest eateries and restaurants in the world - but all he could eat was crackers.

He was so respected in the great state of Pennsylvania that everywhere he went he needed armed body guards to protect him. His wealth afforded him the finest doctors and hospitals - but they gave him one year or less to live. The newspapers somehow got hold of the story and with joy began to publish his obituary in advance. This caused him to rethink his life, his passions, and his attitude.

For most of his life - Mr. Rockefeller dismissed the truth that "life is found in giving - not getting." He called it just "**preacher talk.**" However his attitude and insight were only getting him closer to the grave so he decided to try this thing the Bible called giving. Armed with this new attitude he literally gave his money away. He directed his life and wealth to churches and outreach ministry to the poor and needy. Since he was sick - he established the Rockefeller Foundation whose funding led to the marvelous discovery of the first new kind of antibiotic called penicillin. He suddenly began to sleep - he could eat once again - his hair returned and his health improved. He lived to the ripe old age of 98 simply because he changed his attitude.

This opened up the clogged spiritual arteries of his heart which changed his life forever. His prison doors, like Paul's, were opened as well. His life now had a new purpose and power to it.

It seems that a focused mind cultivates and produces a focused life. Our actions and attitudes do grow from the soil in which we plant them. Is it any wonder why Paul wrote these words to us? Let us hear them again: "Finally, brothers, 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. 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."⁴

Amen and amen.

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ENDNOTES

1. NIV, I Cor. 13:2.

² Mart De Haan, March, 2007 column, "**Been Thinking About,**" Radio Bible Class Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI.

3. Victor Frankl, **MAN'S SEARCH FOR MEANING**, page 104.

4. NIV, Philippians 4:8-9.