

Pastor Steven J. Cole  
Flagstaff Christian Fellowship  
123 S. Beaver St.  
Flagstaff, AZ 86001  
[www.fcfonline.org](http://www.fcfonline.org)

## THE IMPORTANCE OF CHRISTIAN CONDUCT

Philippians 4:9

By

Steven J. Cole

October 22, 1995

Copyright, 1995

October 22, 1995  
Philippians Lesson 26

## The Importance Of Christian Conduct Philippians 4:9

A doctor from Texas owned a home in Mexico. He felt sorry for the poor people there, many of whom were often sick because they didn't pasteurize their milk. So he bought them a pasteurizing machine. The villagers built a special shed to house it in and made a big deal out of it when he finally brought it down and installed it. When the doctor returned a few months later, the leading man of the village greeted him, "Oh, doctor, good to see you! If we had known you were coming, we would have plugged in the pasteurizing machine."

Obviously, a pasteurizing machine doesn't do a bit of good if it isn't plugged in and used for its intended purpose. While we chuckle at the story, many Christians treat the Bible like those poor villagers were treating that machine. It occupies a central place on a coffee table in their home. They believe in all the good it can do. But they aren't plugging it in to deal with the very problems in their lives it is intended to solve. They are not applying Scripture to change their conduct.

They're like the gray-haired old lady, a long time church member, who shook hands with her pastor after the service one Sunday. "That was a wonderful sermon," she told him, "just wonderful! Everything you said applies to someone I know."

We all tend to think that attending church is a nice, safe thing to do. It feels good to sing and to fellowship with the nice people and to hear a message from God's Word. But James 1:22 warns us that if we hear God's Word but do not become doers of it, we deceive ourselves. Hearing the Bible and knowing the Bible without translating that knowledge into obedience is dangerous because we deceive ourselves. The Bible was not written to satisfy our curiosity or to fill our notebooks with charts on prophecy or theology. It was written to be translated into genuinely Christian conduct in our daily lives.

In Philippians 4:9, Paul exhorts us to follow his example by becoming doers of the Word. He shows us that

Christian conduct is built on biblical content and is vital because it results in the very presence of the God of peace.

Verse 9 must not be separated from verse 8. Our thought life forms the basis for our behavior. If our conduct is simply outward conformity to the expectations of the Christian crowd, it is not genuine and will not stand up under pressure or temptation. Christian conduct must flow out of a Christian thought life, and as we saw last week, a Christian thought life is the result of genuine conversion, where God imparts to us a new nature that is able to please Him. Martyn Lloyd-Jones put it this way,

... the gospel is not something we add to our lives, it is rather, something which should entirely dominate them. ...

The Christian life, therefore, is not merely a modification of the natural life, it is a new life, and Christians do not merely add something to their lives, they are people who have been changed at the centre, they are entirely different (*The Life of Peace* [Baker], p. 191).

Once we are converted through faith in Christ, we begin the process of sanctification, or growth in holiness, through the renewal of our minds through Scripture, and the corresponding changes in our conduct, so that we learn to please God with our lives. In verse 9, Paul shows us how this process works and why it is of vital importance, namely, that the sense of God's presence as the God of peace is linked with it. He mentions four components: (1) The intellectual--"What you have learned"; (2) The volitional--"What you received"; (3) The behavioral--"What you have heard and seen, which you must practice"; (4) The emotional--"The God of peace shall be with you."

1. The intellectual component: The Christian faith has content that must be taught and learned.

The word "learned" implies that the Christian faith has content which must be taught by someone who understands it and mentally grasped by those he teaches. Of course, the Christian faith is much more than mere intellectual understanding, as we will see.

And even on the intellectual level, Scripture teaches that “the god of this world [Satan] has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (2 Cor. 4:4). Thus God must open the minds of unbelievers to respond to the gospel, as Paul goes on to say, “For God, who said, ‘Light shall shine out of darkness,’ is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6). God shines into our hearts to give us *knowledge*, and such knowledge is grasped with the mind.

We once visited a church where the pastor did not clearly communicate the content of the gospel, but when he gave the invitation at the end of the service, about a dozen people went forward. I said to Marla, “What in the world are they responding to?” It had to be a mostly emotional response to the mood and music rather than an intelligent response to the truth of the content of the gospel, because such truth had not been made clear. But Christian faith is not in a vague feeling. It is not faith in faith itself, as in the popular song, “I Believe.” It is not faith in “God however you conceive Him to be.”

This week at the Million Man March in Washington, D.C., Mayor Marion Barry, who spent time in jail for doing crack cocaine, thanked God for his recovery and told the crowd, “The vision for the Million Man March came directly from God himself. It was God-inspired.... Whether we call god Jesus Christ, Yahweh, Jehovah, Allah or just God, he’s God. I know first hand God’s power, God’s grace and God’s redemptive love” (*Arizona Daily Sun*, 10/16/95, p. 1). That is generic faith, but it is not biblical faith. Biblical faith is in the historical person of Jesus Christ as revealed in Scripture and in what He did for us in dying on the cross. Thus there is specific content, an intellectual element, to the gospel message.

Once a person has responded by faith to the person and work of Jesus Christ, he must go on to learn the great doctrines of the Christian faith. We live in a day that disparages doctrine. We think that it is some needless nicety for theologians and seminarians to banter about. But we need to remember that Paul didn’t write the major doctrinal portions of his letters to theologians. He wrote

Romans and Ephesians and the other great doctrinal sections to common people, many of them uneducated slaves, who had come to faith in Christ, to help them understand how to live in a manner pleasing to God.

Note the importance of teaching in Paul's ministry: In Acts 11:26, Barnabas brought Paul (then called Saul) to Antioch, "And it came about that for an entire year they met with the church, and taught considerable numbers; ..." In Acts 17:2-3, Paul "reasoned with [the Jews] from the Scriptures, explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, 'This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ.'" Paul's evangelistic efforts were not based on emotional appeals, but on a reasonable appeal to their minds.

We see the same thing in Acts 19:8-10, where Paul was in the synagogue in Ephesus for three months, "reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God." But when some became hardened and disobedient, he withdrew with the disciples, and continued to reason with them daily from the Word of God. In Acts 20:20, 27 he reminds the Ephesian elders how he "did not shrink from declaring to [them] anything that was profitable, and teaching [them] publicly and from house to house," how he "did not shrink from declaring to [them] the whole purpose of God."

In Colossians 1:28, Paul describes his ministry: "And we proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, that we may present every man complete in Christ." In his pastoral letters to Timothy and Titus, Paul repeatedly emphasizes the theme of "sound doctrine." In the final chapter he wrote before his death, he exhorted Timothy with what must have been of utmost importance (2 Tim. 4:2-3), "Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; ..."

Thus the Christian faith has content that must be learned and taught. The question is, *Are you studying and learning God's Word?* It doesn't happen without diligence and effort. I encourage you to apply yourself to learn the great truths of God's Word with a view to obedient application.

2. The volitional component: The content of the Christian faith must be responded to with our will.

Our text mentions “the things you have learned and *received*.” The word means to take unto oneself, especially the traditions as delivered and handed down from Christ to the apostles. Here it has special reference to “the ethical and procedural guidelines for Christian living” (F. F. Bruce, *New International Bible Commentary, Philippians* [[Hendrickson], p. 147). To receive the teaching concerning Christ, the gospel, and the moral and ethical demands which go along with it, means to submit our will to the lordship of Jesus Christ over every aspect of our lives, beginning with our thought life (4:8). In other words, the gospel always demands not just an intellectual response, but also a moral response, where we personally receive Christ as Savior and Lord.

I have found that invariably, people who claim to have intellectual problems that keep them from responding to the gospel in reality have moral problems that are the real reason for their not responding. Every person, from the Ph.D. at the university to the illiterate subsistence farmer in Mexico, has the same need, namely, that his sin has separated him from the Holy God. Thus he needs Christ as Savior. But, every person also has the same stubborn self-will that refuses to submit to Jesus as Lord. We all want to run our own lives without bowing before Jesus.

So if a person tells me that he can't believe in Christ because of intellectual problems, I will say, “Specifically, which problems?” He may name something, such as evolution or that he doesn't believe the Bible is God's Word. I respond, “If I can provide you with reasonable answers to that problem, will you then believe in Christ?” I've never yet had a person say, “Yes.” Instead, he will say, “Well, there are other issues, too.” I say, “Name them. Give me the list, and if I can provide reasonable answers to each problem on your list, then will you become a follower of Christ?” I'm trying to help the person see that the real issue isn't intellectual, it's moral. He doesn't want to give up sex with his girl friend or doing drugs or some other sin. But the content of the Christian faith must be received by submitting our will to Christ.

3. The behavioral component: The content of the Christian faith must be worked out in real life conduct.

Paul says, "The things you have ... *heard and seen in me, practice* these things; ..." Paul is not boasting in himself. He simply knew that his life had integrity. He did not teach one thing and live another. He did not act one way in public, but have a secret life of sin in private. You could follow him around 24 hours of the day, seven days a week, and see a man who walked with God, even in the trials he encountered. In fact, the Philippians had seen and heard about Paul and Silas singing hymns of praise and praying in the Philippian jail at midnight during his first visit to that city. You can't fake it when you have been wrongly denied justice, when your back is laid open and your feet are in the stocks in a smelly, rat-infested jail cell. Paul's Christian life was real in the crunch, and so he could honestly, without pride, call people to follow him as he followed Christ (see 1 Cor. 4:16; 11:1; Phil. 3:17; 1 Thess. 1:6; 2 Thess. 3:9; 2 Tim. 3:10).

His words point out the importance of having godly examples who show us not only by their words, but also by the way they conduct themselves in the home and in all their lives, how to live the Christian faith in the real world. Pastor John MacArthur correctly advises, "Never expose yourself to the ministry of someone whose lifestyle you can't respect" (*Anxiety Attacked* [Victor Books], p. 41). John Calvin said, "It would be better for the preacher to break his neck going into the pulpit than for him not to be the first to follow God."

It is not that Paul or any man, except Jesus, is sinless. But a man who teaches God's Word must live it with integrity. That's why an essential qualification for both elders and deacons is that they manage their own households well (1 Tim. 3:4-5, 12). If I am not living under the lordship of Christ with my wife and children, dealing with problems in a biblical manner, demonstrating the fruit of the Spirit in my relationships with them, then I need to get out of the ministry.

Those of us who have walked with the Lord for a few years need to be looking for younger men (or, women with women) we can spend time with to show them by the way we live how they should live as Christians in daily life. That may threaten you, because you can't fake it if a guy is watching you when difficult situa-

tions arise. Do you live Christ in those situations? Do you demonstrate godliness when you're provoked?

When I was in my early twenties, a brother in his early thirties, who was married with three young daughters, invited me to live with them for a short while. I spent three months with them, and while he and I couldn't spend as much time together as I had hoped for, because of his busy schedule, I still could see the reality of Christ in their family life.

Also, I have been helped tremendously by reading Christian biographies. I feel like I know many of the great saints who have gone before me because I have read their stories and I know how they dealt with the trials and tests that came into their lives. By reading their biographies, I learn how the content of the Christian faith takes on shoe leather, how it works out in daily conduct. I encourage you to read the biographies of the faithful saints who have gone before us.

When Paul says, "Practice these things," the word implies doing something repeatedly until it becomes a habit or way of life. At first, habits feel awkward and unnatural. Remember the first time you ever drove a car with a stick shift? It seemed like there were a million things to remember and do all at once. But once you get it down, so that it's a habit, you can hop in the car and drive off while discussing some fine point of theology with a friend, and you don't even think about what you're doing.

Habits can be either your friend or your foe. Godly habits work for you, since they determine your daily routine in ways that help you grow in holiness. In Luke 4:16 we read that Jesus came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up, and then it says, "and as was His *custom*, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath ...." Jesus had a habit of spending the Sabbath with God's people, worshiping God. We should have the same habit every Lord's day. We should have the habit of reading God's Word and praying each day. We should have the habit of avoiding things that pollute our minds. Habits come from practicing these things over and over. At first, when you're changing from ungodly practices to pleasing God, it may seem awkward. Keep at it, practice it until it becomes your routine.

Thus, Christian conduct is built on the biblical content of the Christian faith. There is the *intellectual* component of the faith, which is grasped by the mind. There is the *volitional* component, yielding our will to receive God's truth personally. There is the *behavioral* component, learning to put the Christian faith into daily practice. Finally,

4. The emotional component: The result of Christian conduct is the very presence of the God of peace with you.

In verse 7 we saw that specific, thankful *prayer* results in the *peace of God* guarding our hearts and minds. In verse 9 we see that the *practice* of Christian conduct results in the *God of peace* being with us. You may be wondering, "I thought that God is always with us. Why does Paul say something that's always true as if it were a special deal?" The answer is, because it is a special deal! Yes, God is always with the believer (Matt. 28:20; Heb. 13:5). But we do not always sense His presence, nor do we always know His presence with us as the God of *peace*. He is the God who is never troubled by the ups and downs of life, by the storms of circumstances that batter us around, because He is the eternal, sovereign, Almighty God who accomplishes His purpose (see Isa. 40).

Do you covet and seek for the presence of God, the God of peace, in your life? When Moses was faced with the awesome task of leading an entire nation out of bondage in Egypt through the barren Sinai desert, he prayed, "If Your presence does not go with us, do not lead us up from here. For how then can it be made known that I have found favor in Your sight, I and Your people? Is it not by Your going with us, so that we, I and Your people, may be distinguished from all the other people who are upon the face of the earth?" (Exod. 33:15-16). God responded by promising His presence. The presence of the God of peace with us is promised if we put our knowledge of the Christian faith into daily Christian conduct.

### Conclusion

D. A. Carson writes (*Christianity Today* [6/29/79], p. 31),

The supreme irony is that Christians hear best what the Spirit is saying to someone else. Speak to the fundamentalist about the truth, and he hears you, precisely because he doesn't need

to; it is the person with fuzzy notions about the eternity of the truth who will not hear. Speak to the *genuinely* broad-minded ecumenist about love, and he hears you, precisely because he doesn't need to, but fundamentalists of a harsher variety will not.... The one who truly hears what the Spirit says to the churches will be the one who is receptive to the words of God that he least wishes to hear [emphasis his].

Elisabeth Elliot once overheard her young daughter singing to her cat, "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like *you!*" We're all like that; the truth applies to the other guy! "If just my wife and kids would apply this to their lives, we'd have a happy family!" No, *I* need to apply the content of the Christian faith to *my* daily conduct. Then, the God of peace will be with me. Let's all practice being doers of the Word and not hearers only who deceive themselves!

### Discussion Questions

1. Why is Bible knowledge without application dangerous?
2. Why does modern Christianity disparage doctrine? How can we overcome this?
3. Is most change in Christian conduct instantaneous deliverance or a slow struggle? *Why?*
4. On which of the four components (intellectual, volitional, behavioral, emotional) should our primary focus be? *Why?*

Copyright 1995, Steven J. Cole, All Rights Reserved.