

Philippians 2:19-24 Part 3
The Importance of the Occupation of the Attention of the Mind Part 3
also Luke 10:38-42

We are continuing our study in the book of Philippians. And as we have said before the theme of Philippians is fellowship. And in order for believers to fellowship together, basically in summary, we must deny ourselves and put the sensitivity to others as our priority. Not what we are getting out of it, but how the Lord might use us to minister to and touch others.

In Philippians 2:17-18 Paul presented The Procedure for Fellowship, which is basically self-sacrifice. And his self-sacrifice for the spiritual welfare of others was an offering to God, a sweet-smelling savor. But we are in Philippians 2:19-30, which is The Proof of Character in Fellowship. The Proof of Character. One of the reasons why we have trouble fellowshiping with others is not because who the other people are, but because it brings out in us and out of us our own inadequacies to tolerate, and to cope, and to function with others. Especially people that we would not choose to fellowship with, but God has us in fellowship with.

So The Proof of Character in Fellowship has to do with what a person meditates on. We are focused on a word in the New Testament that is very important, it is called **μέριμνα** (merimna); and it is a word that has to do with the thoughts or the occupation of the attention of the mind. We have studied this several times before in the past, but it is always good to go over it again, especially to add more material to it.

We saw in Matthew 6:24 that God's Word proclaims that the human being has been created with only one capacity, to serve one master. That we will either love the one and hate the other, or cling to the one and despise the other. That a man or person only has the capacity to serve either God or mammon. **μαμμωνα** (mammōna) is the Aramaic word for the physical world in which we live. And because we have only one capacity, Satan takes advantage of that. Once I have received Jesus Christ as my Savior - and by that I mean His Spirit coming into my spirit, born of His Spirit, regenerated by His Spirit - I have become a new creation in Christ.

And as we said the first hour, once Christ comes to live within my spirit the Holy Spirit seals me. He promises not to leave, and the Holy Spirit protects from any invasion. My soul now belongs to Christ. Period. After He saves me His plan is then to renew my mind. Being saved does not mean that your mind has been healed from all the experiences of sin, or the experiences of abuse that you suffered in the past. It means you have been delivered from a spiritual force that basically is leading you down a path of destruction. And now Christ has saved you and now you belong to Jesus Christ. And from here on in for the rest of your life His Spirit is going to be renewing the mind, healing, changing the cortex of the brain.

So it only stands to reason, Satan knows that we been created with only one capacity. If he can occupy the attention of our mind with the things of the world, he can take us away from the Word of God. Take us away. Not remove us from Christ but get us so busy and occupied; even so tired out from mentally dealing with the world all day long that we just do not have it to go and receive from the Lord through His Word that transforms our minds.

But we saw that Paul himself said in two places - II Corinthians 11:28 and I Corinthians 12:24-26 - that he himself was **μέριμνα** (merimna) concerning the spiritual things of the churches. He was *occupied* with the spiritual things of the churches.

And he tells the Philippians in Philippians chapter 2 beginning at verse 19, first of all he expresses his concern for their spiritual welfare, so much so that he hopes **to send Timothy to you quickly** (purpose clause) **in order that I might be of good comfort after having known of the things concerning you.** By way of explanation of sending Timothy, **For I have no one like-minded** (literally *equal-souled, equal-psyched*) **who genuinely will care for the things concerning you.** The reason why I have no one but Timothy **is because all the ones are seeking the things of themselves, not the things which are of Christ Jesus.** Timothy is occupied with a spiritual concern for you, so I am sending Timothy. The others, they are busy seeking out and occupied with the things of themselves, and not of Christ.

So, principle number one in our struggle in life as we have studied before, principle number one is a question: Is my problem because I am struggling with the things of myself or because I am struggling with the things of Christ? those things that belong to Him? Most of the time we have to admit that mentally we are occupied with the things of ourselves and not the things of Christ. We are too busy. We have allowed the home invasion. Paul called the psyche *the arena*. He is not talking about psychology or psychiatry. He is talking about the fact that after you are saved the interaction and that the energy impulses of God's Spirit ministering and transforming you happen in the brain. It is not religion. It is relationship. A person actually is changed and becomes a new creation. And so if Satan can get my mind occupied with the things of myself, he has taken me away from the things of Christ. Very important point.

We saw last week in Luke 8:4-15 in the parable of the sower that Jesus said there are four kinds of soil that the Word of God (the seed) falls on. One of them is that the seed, the Word of God falls in among the weeds and chokes out the influence of the Word as these weeds grow. And he explained that the weeds represent the cares, and riches, and the pride of life. The word *care* is our word **μέριμνα** (merimna), *occupied*. I am occupied with the things of this life, and it chokes out the influence of God's Word. Because it is not just going to hear the Word, it is not just going to church, but really meditating on what is being taught and said.

All we do, all we are supposed to do as teachers and preachers is that we are supposed to give you the information. And hopefully it comes in the form of ministry of God's Spirit. But it is not a one-time thing. These are things we have to meditate on, and pray about, and reread, and rethink after receiving the information. And so Jesus said that the cares of this life choke out the influence of God's Word in a person's life. Which impresses upon us it is not just important to show up to fellowship, or Bible study, or church; because if I go out and become occupied with the things of the world again, all week long the influence of that Word upon my life is dissipated. Not because God's Word is not powerful enough, but it is the way God has designed it. There is a relationship going on here. It is not an automatic thing. We are not robots.

So today our text is going to be - we are still in Philippians 2:19-21 but the side text we are going to take is Luke 10:38-42. This is the story about Mary and Martha. Just a few verses

but very powerful. In fact some secular psychologists have actually used this section to extract the principles of psychiatry from, even though that is not what the text is really all about.

The text says, **Now it happened as they were going, that Jesus himself entered into a certain village: and a certain woman, Martha by name, welcomed him into her house.** Obviously, she is the older of the two. She welcomed Jesus into their home. **And to her was a sister called Mary, which also when sat at the feet of Jesus, she was hearing His Word.** Now those are the characteristics of Mary. Martha welcomes Him into her home, but Martha also had a sister, and her reputation was that whenever her she had the chance she would sit at the feet of Jesus and was continually hearing His Word. That is pretty noble.

Verse 40, **Now Martha was distracted concerning much serving.** So she is in the kitchen stewing, literally, both on the stove and in her mind. She is stewing. She has to feed all of these people and Jesus is in her living room, and the crowds are in the living room listening, and her sister is sitting at Jesus's feet listening to His Word, while she is in the kitchen cooking for all these people, and she is serving by herself. **And when she stood over him.** So basically what the Greek text says is that she is in the kitchen and her pot has now boiled. She comes into the living room, and she stands over Jesus. **And she said, "Lord, is it not a concern to you that my sister hath left me alone to serve?"** She then says, **"Therefore speak to her in order that she give help to me."** So obviously after the question Jesus nodded His head yes. Because she says, **"Is it not a concern to You that my sister has left me alone to serve?"** He nods His head yes and she says, **"Well therefore speak to her. Tell her to get out here and help me to serve."**

And when Jesus answered he said unto her, "Martha, Martha." Whenever you hear your name twice, every time I read that I remember my mother, "William, William." **He says to her, "Martha, Martha you are anxious and troubled concerning many things."** The word we have translated *anxious* is our word **μέριμνα** (merimna). The attention of your mind is occupied, and you are troubled about many things. The word *troubled* in association with **μέριμνα** (merimna) means that not only was her mind occupied, but it was now showing. It is like seeing someone walk down the street, you know they are troubled about something. They have that external vibe about them, that look about them, that whatever they are occupied with has now taken over their facial and human expressions. **"Martha, Martha you are anxious,"** you have your mind occupied with and you are expressing your trouble because of it **"concerning many things."**

Verse 42 says, **"But one thing is necessary."** Did you catch that? How many things are necessary in life? One. **"But one thing is necessary: and Mary chose that good portion."** A little food terminology there. Mary chose the food for the soul, the good portion. **"Which shall not be taken away (or removed) from her."** So He was telling her, "Martha, yes, I care that you are out in the kitchen cooking and serving by yourself. So concerned. I am not concerned about Mary coming out and helping you, but I am concerned about you stopping what you are doing and take care of the true priority in life."

Any of us would have done exactly what Martha did. You have all these people in your house, it is dinner time, who is going to feed all these people? And this happened in a day where

there was no drive-through. It is not like you can send somebody down to McDonald's and pick up some burgers after the study is over, you know?

Now there are two words: one is our word **μέριμνα** (merimna) and the other one is the word that we translated *distraction*. That *she was in the kitchen distracted with much serving*. These two words found together are only found one other place that we will take next week in I Corinthians 7. Obviously, Paul knew about this episode because he is going to give us the five principles of life. Paul's advice is that I am not trying to put a noose around your neck, I am just trying to make it so that your service to the Lord is without distraction. And he lists all the things that we are naturally distracted by. So she was distracted.

We in the outward evaluation of the situation, we probably would have pinned a medal on her. Look at her service to Christ. But Jesus said, "No, your service to Christ is not the top priority." It is hearing His Word. In fact, I know of people in the past that have come up to me and said to me, "My church is miserable. I do not like my church. So in order to keep from having to sit in on the sermons I volunteered to teach Sunday school class." Justified by the fact that they said, "Well, it is serving the Lord but at least I do not have to sit in and listen those bad sermons." Wrong priority. If you are not getting fed, you have to go to where you are getting fed. Sometimes people even subconsciously stay busy in church so they do not have to hear the Word. They do not like the Word.

Service to Christ is not a higher priority than hearing His Word. Period. And Jesus is pointing out to Martha that even the occupation of the attention of her mind can be caught up in the things of Christ and serving Christ, and it would still be wrong because it is not the right priority. And we can only be occupied with one thing. If the Lord allows us to be occupied with ministry things then it is in service to Christ. But when it comes to the point where it takes the place of the hearing of the Word of God, then it is wrong. Shut down the kitchen. Call in the volunteers. It is time to get in the Word. That is basically what He is saying.

But I like that last phrase, ***but one thing is necessary***. Some Greek texts say, *There are many things that are necessary, really only one*. Because there are many things that we think are necessary. We can list them. But Jesus said, "In reality there is only one thing necessary, and Mary chose the good meal," sitting at the feet of Jesus and hearing His Word. Again, we are not talking about bare-bones Bible study here. We are not talking about Christians going to a Bible study because God's Spirit could not be in it; it not be a ministry of God's Spirit to people's hearts and minds; it not be changing and transforming and healing people in their minds. We can be involved in a church religious or Bible study setting where we are just studying the Bible like it is a textbook. And if God's Spirit is not in it, if God's Spirit is not making it alive, if God's Spirit is not speaking to us, then it is a vain, empty, activity. Period. Spiritually. There is only one thing necessary. Sitting at the feet of Jesus and hearing His Word. That is more than just the Bible. It is Christ's Spirit through the Bible. It is His Spirit manifesting Himself to us.

The importance, all these places are using the same ministry, same word that Jesus used back in Matthew 6:25, "Do not be anxious for your life, your clothing, your food. Do not let yourself be trapped even by the worry and occupation with the necessities of life." Every little thing. We think about it, and think about it, and it snowballs on us, maybe even to the point that

people can tell by the expression of our face. "Oh, you are troubled about many things are you not?" So it is not a matter of being occupied with trying to not be occupied; but rather we are encouraged to be occupied with the things of Christ, not the things of ourselves.

In case you have not noticed, if you want to focus on yourself there is a lot of things. Did you ever notice that? There are not enough hours in the day for me to think about all of my things. I have to get a good night's sleep so I can get up and start afresh and think of more things to think about. If somebody paid me it could be a full-time job, just thinking of my things. "Mmmm, yeah. I have a hotline. Do you want to call and listen to my things?" That would make your day, would it not?

"Oh, I am having such a good day, I think I will call Bill on the hotline."

"How is it going, Bill?"

"Well! You sure you want to know?"

When we surrender ourselves to the Lord, when we protect that one place of intimacy where God's Spirit interacts with our thought processes, where God's Spirit heals the mind by the hearing of His Word and ministry of His Word. We are allured and seduced by the world. It is harlotry. Because whatever I do, even if it is important that I have to do it, I am still influenced by it. It is still causing an effect on my life, on my thinking, on my approach to life.

I am surprised at how many things of necessity that I do during the day and try to keep it at necessities and still come home messed up in my thinking. Because I come home thinking about what I just did, especially when that woman stepped on my foot while I was waiting in line at the store. And why is it that I get home and I think about that woman stepping on my foot? Maybe because my foot hurts. I do not know. I mean you get so obsessed with your sore foot you even contemplate, maybe think of calling a tow truck. I mean how far do you take it? It just happens naturally.

But that is what it means to be a Christian. I belong to Christ because of His saving grace and His presence in my life. I have been born of the Spirit of God and now He wants to have fellowship with me in the arena called the psyche, where His Spirit through the energy impulses of His Spirit He is feeding my mind with the truth of God's Word. And Satan is trying to allure me and seduce me away. And it happens so subtly you do not even realize it until about Wednesday night, maybe even Monday night, but by Wednesday night you are like, "Whoa, what trip was I on?" You realize where you are, and scramble to get back to that precious relationship with Christ.

Let's close with prayer.