

Paul had just entreated two important women in the church to get past their differences. Euodia and Syntyche needed to agree in the Lord to keep division from infiltrating the church. Paul went on to exhort the whole church to rejoice in the Lord. He told them to take their concerns to the Lord in prayer and allow God's peace to guard their hearts and minds in Christ.

Our passage today continues with the thought of guarding our hearts and minds in Christ. It is another of the great passages in this letter that is well worth memorizing! ⁸ *Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.* Philippians 4:8 (ESV)

This simple instruction is the way to be the joyful believer that Paul is instructing us to be. The great majority of our struggles with attitude come from not taking charge of our thought life.

When I approached the time to prepare this sermon, I had just come back from vacation. My mind had been wandering to some painful broken relationships and how hard it was when faced with an ultimatum to compromise convictions or end a relationship. I had just enjoyed a blessed time with my family and should have been overflowing with joy, but instead, I was becoming depressed. I wasn't practicing what Paul said was his one important action, to forget what is behind and strain toward the prize, the upward calling of Christ in God. (3:13) But then I looked at this passage and realized what was happening. I was allowing myself to be spiritually defeated when the victory was mine if I would just make one simple choice, to think on what is good.

Suddenly, I did what we call in wrestling, a reversal. The enemy had me in a hold and I turned it around and put him in one. When speaking of spiritual warfare, Paul told the Corinthians to *take every thought captive to obey Christ*, 2 Corinthians 10:5b (ESV) I took my thoughts captive and my attitude went from depression to joy, from whining to praise, from defeat to victory.

It's not always that easy. Sometimes we go through unexplainable hardship that is so painful that it seems to be impossible to take our thoughts captive. The battle goes on for a much longer time; but if we will endure, the victory will be ours. The longer the battle the greater the lessons learned and the more our faith will grow. The vast majority of the time it is as simple as just choosing to dwell on what is good.

Commented [Paul1]: Philippians 3:13 (ESV)

¹³ Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead.

Paul starts his list with another "finally". If you recall, he used that word at the beginning of chapter 3. This time he really is wrapping things up, and he does so with this list of things to think about. Let's examine each expression.

Think on whatever is true... The Word of God is truth. (Psalm 119:160; Proverbs 30:5) The words of Jesus are true. Jesus said that He came to testify to the truth and that everyone on the side of truth listens to Him. (John 18:37) God cannot lie. (Numbers 23:19) His word will always prove true. I may think it has failed, but that is because I am so limited in my understanding. When I apply the Word that comes with a promise, I should expect to see the promise come to pass in God's time. If I find my thinking in contradiction to the Word of truth, then I must adjust my thinking. It is not ignoring reality, but rather conforming my thinking to the reality of the Word, the ultimate reality. I guarantee you that if you apply the Word with its proper meaning in its context, then you will see that it is true.

Much of our mindset and attitude depend on our interpretation of events. It is amazing how two people can see the same event and come up with a completely different perspective. When we went through Mexican security at the airport, they took away Kaiden's favorite toy, little rubber missiles that you dive for in a pool. His dad saw an unreasonable request. I would too if I were Kaiden's daddy. I saw God teaching Kaiden to hold on to things of this world lightly. Ed saw the potential of Kaiden being untrusting of people in uniform.

Think in terms of the truth of the Word. Is there a Scripture that applies? "Submit to those in authority." (Romans 13:1) If I see my submission to authority as obedience to God who I love, my whole attitude toward the situation changes. It becomes a teaching opportunity for my grandson. It may be too difficult to understand at the moment, but the Word of God has brought truth to the situation and changed our attitude and guided our thoughts. Interpret your situations in life through the lens of the Word of God, and you will be thinking on what is true.

Think on whatever is honorable... NIV uses the word "noble". I believe this should be in consideration of our own behavior and also to notice that which is honorable around us. In relationship to our own behavior, we should ask ourselves how we can act in a way that honors God. (Romans 13:13-14) Peter exhorted the church to ¹² *Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.* 1Peter 2:12 (ESV) Because we represent Christ, we should be honorable in everything we do. If we are not, because of some cost to us, those who feel cheated will point to our faith and

Commented [Paul2]: Philippians 3:1 (ESV)

¹ Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you.

Commented [Paul3]: Psalm 119:160 (NIV)

¹⁶⁰ All your words are true; all your righteous laws are eternal.

Commented [Paul4]: Proverbs 30:5 (ESV)

⁵ Every word of God proves true; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him.

Commented [Paul5]: John 18:37 (NIV)

³⁷ "You are a king, then!" said Pilate. Jesus answered, "You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."

Commented [Paul6]: Numbers 23:19 (ESV)

¹⁹ God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?

Commented [Paul7]: Romans 13:1 (NIV)

¹ Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.

Commented [Paul8]: Romans 13:13-14 (ESV)

¹³ Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy.

¹⁴ But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

either say that it does not have the power to change lives or that it a false belief. Our witness is sullied.

Doing what is right does not mean being a doormat, but rather being honest no matter the cost.

The world is rarely honest in its dealings. I could give you a dozen examples, but Paul just told us not to think on those things, so I'll refuse the temptation. Don't we just love to go over injustices, as if we were somehow getting even?

When people are dishonest with us we have the tendency to play it again and again in our mind. The result is a poisonous bitterness that only hurts us. They have most likely forgotten the deed and gone on to be dishonest with someone else. We only hurt ourselves when we think on the dishonesty of others. We can certainly learn a lesson and not be fooled twice, but refuse to dwell on the dishonest act.

Instead look for noble actions and think about those. Think about the time when others went out of their way to be kind to you. Think of those who stand their ground for Christ even when it costs them a great deal. Think about the testimonies of great men and women of God who lived nobly. (Titus 2:7; Philippians 2:29)

Think about *whatever is just...* This means to be a person who deals equitably with others. Sometimes the word is translated "righteous" or "upright". This is a qualification for elders. (Titus 1:8) Once again this applies to our own behavior and when thinking of others' behavior. It is similar to the word honorable, but more along the lines of being holy. (Luke 2:25) What would God think of your action? You can be honest but not be righteous. This means we must be sure our hearts are open to God's direction and correction. We should think about whether our behavior and attitude is pleasing to God or not. (Colossians 1:10)

When we see holiness in others, a heart that is sensitive to being obedient to the Holy Spirit, we should take note of it. We should contemplate the fruit of that life and observe how they cultivate that sensitivity. Think on the righteous acts of others. Paul already encouraged them to do this in the last chapter. (Philippians 3:17)

Think about *whatever is pure...* Our world is fallen and therefor filled with the impure. If we dwell on evil for long, or even that which infiltrates the good and corrupts, we will soon be discouraged. But we know that what is pure will endure. What is pure will prevail in the end.

The enemy of your soul wants to engulf your thoughts with the impure. Pornography is one of his favorite weapons in our time. If he can fill your mind with idols that promise

Commented [Paul9]: Titus 2:7 (ESV)
⁷ Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity,

Commented [Paul10]: Philippians 2:29 (ESV)
²⁹ So receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honor such men,

Commented [Paul11]: Titus 1:8 (ESV)
⁸ but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined.

Commented [Paul12]: Luke 2:25 (ESV)
²⁵ Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him.

Commented [Paul13]: Colossians 1:10 (ESV)
¹⁰ so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.

Commented [Paul14]: Philippians 3:17 (ESV)
¹⁷ Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.

satisfaction but are only a cheap counterfeit, he can keep you from dwelling on the pure word of God which is your weapon to defeat him. (Hebrews 4:12; Ephesians 6:17)

This battle for the high ground of the mind is one that takes constant vigilance. If we let down our guard for a moment, our thoughts can be overwhelmed and thoughts become patterns that eventually spill over into behavior.

Instead, fill your thoughts with the pure word of God. (Psalm 19:8) The Word helps you see what is real and lasting. It unmasks the deceit of temptation. It strengthens you for the battle and arms you. Watch what you watch, but even more importantly, guard what you dwell on. Be sure it is pure. (Titus 2:14) Develop a habit of rejecting impure thoughts.

Think about *whatever is lovely*... Used only here in the New Testament, this is a compound word that means "brotherly love toward". So rather than to think of an object like a lovely flower, we should think in terms of loving acts. How can we show love? Jesus told us we are to love one another. (John 13:35) It would then behoove us to think about how we can do that. It would be good to note those acts in others. If the church is anything, it is to be about love for God and for one another. If we don't have that we are not a church of Jesus Christ. We need to think about how we can accept the love of God for one another.

Think about *whatever is commendable*... There is obviously some overlap with these terms, and yet each is bringing out a subtle difference. All the previous qualities are commendable, but now Paul is saying to think on anything commendable. It doesn't have to fall into one of the other categories. It may not be a noble or righteous act, or an act of love, but it is a good thing that you should imitate or encourage in others. It is commendable to examine our hearts. It is commendable to read the Word. It is commendable to help a neighbor or to forgive an offense. Think about what you could do that is an example for others to follow.

Instead of dwelling on acts that others should not follow, dwell on the good acts of others that you might demonstrate in your own life as well. We can dwell on that bad driver that cut you off, or we can drive courteously. Which is going to be more joyful? Which will put you in the right frame of mind?

These are the things we should dwell on. These are the qualities we should nurture and encourage in one another. These are the guidelines for our thought life. Paul adds, *if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things*. If we see some excellent or virtuous thing, or something worthy of praise, we should

Commented [Paul15]: Hebrews 4:12 (ESV)

¹² For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Commented [Paul16]: Ephesians 6:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God,

Commented [Paul17]: Psalm 19:8 (ESV)

⁸ the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes;

Commented [Paul18]: Titus 2:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

Commented [Paul19]: John 13:35 (ESV)

³⁵ By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

grab hold of that action or thought and dwell on it. What a joy filled, thankful example we will become to others when we apply this instruction!

Can you picture a church filled with people that only think on excellent, praiseworthy things? What an attractive group of people we would be. Can we do it? If God asks it of us, He will surely provide the power and help to see it come to pass in our lives, if we are willing to let Him reign in us.

Our problem is we are so used to the worlds' way of dwelling on the negative that **we must make a concerted effort to allow God to have His way in our thought life.** We are here to let the Word of God challenge and transform us. I want to challenge all of us to memorize verses 4 through 8 and make a concerted effort to live them. In the weeks to come, if you have a testimony of how it turned around your attitude and actions, please let me know.

I'm concerned that the church today is so caught up in passing politics and opinions of minor doctrine and even being accepted by our peers in the world that we don't stand out as the joyful example God means us to be. All of these virtues describe Jesus. We have one big problem – our thought life! Let's let God change it so we can be a witness of our awesome Lord who is our life. (Colossians 3:2-4)

He is true, honest, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent and praiseworthy! Turn your eyes upon Jesus! If the world is going to see Him, they need to see Him in us who claim that He lives in us.

I know we can do it because Paul did it. That is what Paul is saying in the next verse. You saw it lived out in me. Now you do it. If a former Christian killer can do it, by the grace of God, you can too! ⁹ *What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.* Philippians 4:9 (ESV) Paul not only taught it, but he lived it. He promises that if you do, that great promise that God gave to Moses (Exodus 3:12) and Joshua (Joshua 1:5) will be yours as well. The God of peace will be with you.

Now who doesn't want to live in perfect, unshakeable peace? I know I want it! So what do we have to do? Think on, take account of, the things that are true, just, honorable, pure, lovely, commendable, all virtuous and excellent things! Take control of your thought life and watch your attitude change and the peace of God take over.

All of us struggle with concerns and anxiety to some extent, but this message is especially for those of us who allow worry to overwhelm our life! You don't need to live a life of worry and dread. God has peace for you if you will discipline your thought life

Commented [Paul20]: Colossians 3:2-4 (ESV)

² Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.

³ For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

⁴ When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Commented [Paul21]: Exodus 3:12 (ESV)

¹² He said, "But I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain.

Commented [Paul22]: Joshua 1:5 (ESV)

⁵ No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you.

to remain in the boundaries Paul has described for us here. He isn't saying to ignore the problems. In the previous verses he told us to take them to God. It isn't that you pretend there aren't deadlines and problems, but rather that you dwell on the good and not the problems. God's peace is waiting for you to enter in each and every moment of each and every day. It's your choice.

Don't allow your thought life run wild. Tame it with the Word of God. Take your anxieties to the Lord, think on what is good, and be at peace!

Questions

- 1 How did the chapter begin?
- 2 What is the benefit of a long struggle?
- 3 List the things we are to contemplate and a short definition of each:
- 4 What do all these describe?
- 5 What is the promise if we do this?
- 6 Is it really possible?