

HOW TO THINK POSITIVELY AND BIBLICALLY

Phil 4:7-8

November 27, 2011

INTRODUCTION: Over the last few weeks we have dealt with strongholds and the ability of God's grace to demolish strongholds. Paul, while in Corinth and in the church at Philippi, so desired to help the people "think biblically."

In **2 Corinthians 6:6-7**, Paul shared about his own personal struggles and the weapons he used in order to win over negative thinking that has the power to lead to wrong living.

The Weapons He Used - Tools

The believer's attitude and resources provided by grace are more than a match for any difficulty. However, we must appropriate these by faith in God and His Word. Apart from these, life's difficulties will overwhelm us.

A. INWARD.

1. **"Purity"** – morally clean; life and motive
2. **"Knowledge"** – comprehension of God's truth and His ways
3. **"Long-suffering"** – patience with difficult people; enables one to avoid retaliation when opposed.

B. OUTWARD.

1. **"Kindness"** – goodness put in action
2. **"In the Holy Spirit"** – empowers for effective service
3. **"Love Unfeigned"** – genuine and sincere love
4. **"The Word of Truth"** – the message from God which was the basis for all of Paul's ministry; all His promises
5. **"Power of God"** – divine energizing which lifts the labors of the ministry above mere human effort
6. **"Armor of Righteousness"** – spiritual armor for every sort of struggle; defensively and offensively; sword – shield gave complete protection against the enemy's assault

I. THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE BIBLICAL MIND.

8

A. BUILT ON TRUTH. 8

Jesus is “**the way, the truth, and the life.**” John 14:6
“Your word is truth” John 17:17

B. BUILT ON HONOR (“NOBLE”)

Honest, honorable things that claim respect. If it is true that we externalize our thoughts, then honorable people are the results of honorable thoughts; inviting reverence. This word carries the idea of serious as opposed to frivolous.

Used by Apostle Paul in **1 Tim 3** – reverence

This word is used as a characteristic of both the deacon and his wife in **1 Tim 3:8,11**.

Used also in **Titus 2:2** to refer to church leaders; a quality that makes them worthy of respect; dignity.

Remember, we are to “**think**” on those things. Believers must not think on what is trivial, temporal, mundane, common, and earthly; but rather on what is heavenly, and so worthy of awe, adoration, and praise. All that is true in God’s Word is honorable, noble. Speaks of that which has a service purpose. It’s things that build our self-respect. The word has actually been used to mean worship, revere. We are not to think on things that are dishonorable and permit them to control our thoughts.

When we think on what’s true and noble, we promote inner character.

C. BUILT ON DIVINE STANDARD. (“JUST”)

That which is right; just comes from the word where we get our word for righteous. It speaks of a person who faces his duty and does it. Speaks of right relationship and proper action. We ought to contemplate those things that cause us to be right with God and with each other.

It describes whatever is in perfect harmony with God’s eternal, unchanging standards as revealed in Scripture. Believers are to think on things that are consistent with His Word. In action this word suggests fair and equitable dealings with others. Conformable to God’s standard, thus worthy of His approval. Righteous as in the eyes of God; moral, upright, righteous.

To be “just” is to be a person that wants to do the right thing; not what’s convenient. Righteous in a comprehensive sense. (Integrity)

We are told at the end of v.8 to “**think**” on these things. (Meditate)

Kent Hughes, in *“Disciplines of A Godly Man,”* reminds us that this kind of thinking is a choice.

A.T. Robertson – present middle imperative; we are responsible for our thoughts and can hold them to high or lofty ideals.

Kent Hughes says:

“Each of Paul’s ingredients is explicitly positive. They all defy negative exposition. Each ingredient was, is, a matter of personal choice, and our choices make all the difference in the world. We all can choose a thought program which will produce a Christian mind. I have great sympathy for those whose past have been a series of bad choices. I understand that if over the years one has chosen the impure and the illusory and the negative, it is very difficult to change. But as a Biblical thinker I give no quarter to myself or anyone else who rationalizes his present choices by the past. Brothers, we are free to have a Christian mind. It is within our reach, and it is our duty.

*As we consider how Paul’s program should affect our minds, the sheer weight of its positive demands a determined rejection of negative input: **“Finally, brothers, whatever is untrue, whatever is ignoble, whatever is wrong, whatever is impure (unclean),, whatever is unlovely, whatever is not admirable, if there is anything shoddy or unworthy of praise, do not think about these things.”***

D. BUILT ON PURITY.

A.T. Robertson, old word for all sorts of purity: thoughts, words, and deeds. Can refer to unclean thoughts; when you realize that 35% of every download on the American computer is pornography. What a challenge to **“think purely.”**

How does a person in our day keep his thoughts pure?

By excluding the impure. Once given a lodging, impure thoughts are virtually impossible to evict. They lurk in the hidden recesses of the mind and make their presence known at the most unexpected times.

“If a person once lets his thoughts wander down some impure path, hidden legions joyfully emerge and stampede, pushing the mind into all kinds of sin.”

John Phillips

Psalms 119:9

**“How can a young man cleanse his way?
By taking heed according to Your word.”**

Psalms 119:11

**“Your word I have hidden in my heart,
That I might not sin against You.”**

Lightfoot, in his translation of “pure,” suggests stainless. Some thoughts leave a stain, which is difficult enough to erase.

Living in the impure environment of Philippi, the Philippians would have to fill their minds with pure thoughts in order to combat the unclean influences in their culture.

In **1 Peter 1:13**, Peter told his people to “**gird up the loins of your mind.**” The thought is that of a flowing gown (robe) that needed to be pulled up and tied with a belt; a tight reign on the mind.

Paul knew that moral purity was the “main issue” of his day (**Eph 5:8-12; 4:17:24**). People then, and certainly today, were and are under constant attack by temptations to sexual impurity.

In **1 Tim 5:22**, the word for purity translates “free from sin”; it is often defined as holy, morally clean, and undefiled (close/clean).

Believers are to purify themselves because Jesus Christ is pure.

1 John 3:3, “And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.”

E. BUILT ON THAT WHICH IS PLEASING TO GOD. (“LOVELY”)

Only place the word is used in the New Testament. Translates sweet, gracious, generous, or patient. It was often used to describe the fine arts or music; orderly. The opposite of confusion and disorder. Means beautiful and attractive. It speaks of that which calls for love. It is that quality that causes love to respond to it.

We are to think about the things that reach down within our hearts and cause us to respond in love. Can translate winsome. Love should always be the undergirding force of all our relationships in Christ. A Christian without love is like a ship without a rudder.

When “lovely” becomes described as the way we think, we will build bridges, not barriers; we will throw banquets, not bombs; we will love, not cause discord; we will be selfless, not self-centered; we will promote harmony, unity, not cause strife.

THINK ABOUT THIS TRAIT; WHO COMES TO MIND?

Edna Whitmire, Abby Brown, Neal Hughes

F. BUILT ON THINGS THAT EDIFY. (“GOOD REPORT”)

“Because of the fall in the Garden of Eden, we have a bias towards the degenerate. The secret of a guided thought life is an active assertion of the will, in cooperation with the Holy Spirit, ‘to think on these things.’”

John Phillips

This word is pregnant with meaning; signifies the delivery which guards the lips, that nothing may be expressed in public worship that could disturb devotion or give rise to scandal. Refers to that which does not offend. Speaks of the capacity to look for something helpful to say even if you can't agree with everything that is being done. If you have to disagree, do it in such a way that even your disagreement has helpful suggestions incorporated.

"A Christian does not have the luxury of being unkind."

Good report speaks of all that rings true to the highest standard. Refers to anything that is good to speak about.

The word seems to go back to a pagan practice. At the altar of a pagan god, at the point when the sacrifice was being offered, there was always in the Greek world a time of silence. It was as though the only thing to be heard was that which was worthy of the gods who were to be appeased. The word can be translated, *"Think upon those things that are fit for God to hear."*

What if the only words spoken were words fit for God to hear? Listening to such words, builds us up. Believer's thoughts are elevated by Scripture to fix on the loftiest themes.

II. THE COMMENDATION OF THE BIBLICAL MIND.

8

"if there be any virtue" – does not suggest doubt, but it has the meaning of **"since"** or **"because."** Since you are a Christian, you should think on these things. **Why?**

A. ITS MOTIVATION.

"virtue" – it motivates us to do better. In classical Greek, the word referred to any kind of excellence. It could be the excellence of a farmer harvesting his crops, or the excellence of a tool performing its job. Speaks of accomplishing that for which it was designed or created.

Virtuous things are those things that *enhance* our relationship with God, that can lift us up, that can improve and mature our fellowship with God.

B. ITS COMMENDATION.

"if there be anything praise worthy" – it is worth commending to others.

Psalms 119:165

**"Great peace have those who love Your law,
And nothing causes them to stumble."**

Victor Frankl was a Jewish psychiatrist who spent three grim years in a Nazi prison camp. He lived each hour with the realization that he might be among those who would be exterminated that day. Many who were interred with Frankl died from worrying about their death. Frankl chose not to do that. He developed a positive outlook which enabled him to peer through the broken slats in the wall of his cold hut and take pleasure in the beauty of a sunset. He developed a sense of humor so that he could laugh even in the midst of his pain. He found meaning in his suffering and he tried to help others find that meaning also. As he reflected back upon his prison experience he wrote:

The experiences of camp life show that man does have a choice of action. There were enough examples, often of a heroic nature, which proved that apathy could be overcome, irritability suppressed. Man can preserve a vestige of spiritual freedom, of independence of mind, even in such terrible conditions of psychic and physical stress...everything can be taken from man but one thing: the last of human freedoms –to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s way. And there were always choices to make. Every day, every hour, offered the opportunity to make a decision...

In the final analysis it becomes clear that the sort of person the prisoner became was the result of an inner decision, and not the result of camp influences alone. Fundamentally, therefore, any man can, even under such circumstances, decide what shall become of him mentally and spiritually.

*The Word of God confirms the truth of Frankl's words. We do have a choice to make about our thinking. We are expected to make the correct decision. The Prophet Isaiah wrote, **‘You will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed upon You, because he trusts in You.’ (Isaiah 26:3)** Paul instructed the Corinthians that they were to bring **“every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.” (2 Corinthians 10:5)***