



## We Are What We Think About, So What Are We Thinking About? (Part I)

**Philippians 4:8: (NASB) *Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.***



Most of us do not realize just how much of our lives come down to our own personal choices. We have far more power over how we handle our everyday experiences than we give ourselves credit for. Why wouldn't we claim this power so we can better influence our path? Because we subtly and regularly fall into habits of thinking that lull us into a lukewarm and compliant attitude of submission. The Apostle Paul was all about helping us, as his fellow disciples of Christ, challenge the status quo and reset our minds so we can daily think and choose with spiritual

clarity. Much of the letter he wrote to the Philippian Christians focused in on the adverse conditions in life and how to think through them. Examining this letter is the first step to better focusing our thinking!

Paul was imprisoned by Rome twice in the last years of his life. His first imprisonment was a two-year house arrest. During this time, he wrote four letters to the brotherhood that Christians refer to as the "prison letters" or "prison epistles" – Philippians we are looking at now, and Ephesians, Colossians and Philemon. We also believe he wrote the book of Hebrews during this time.



In this episode, we will "think about thinking" in the book of Philippians.

### THINKING ABOUT THINKING:



In the book of Philippians, what does the Apostle Paul teach us about our thinking long before he tells us to "think or dwell on these things"?

In our theme scripture, Paul tells us to *dwell on these things*—what does he say before that to get us focused?



**Paul begins by expressing his confidence in his brethren within the context of his own imprisonment:**

Philippians 1:6-11: (NASB) <sup>6</sup>For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus. <sup>7</sup>For it is only right for me to feel this way about you all, because I have you in my heart, since both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers of grace with me.

Paul has a strong feeling of community with the Philippian Christians. He lets them know at the beginning of this letter that he feels this way about them. He tells them he is *confident* God can finish this good work He began in them because they have been faithfully working alongside of Paul.

<sup>8</sup>For God is my witness, how I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. <sup>9</sup>And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, <sup>10</sup>so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ; <sup>11</sup>having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

The church at Philippi was the first congregation Paul had established in northern Greece. He knew these brethren personally. In many ways, this was a love letter from the Apostle Paul. He was passionate about the growth and development of these brethren in Christ, and he pours his heart out to them.



**He shares his positive spiritual perspective in spite of the physical limitations of his imprisonment:**

Philippians 1:12-13: (NASB) <sup>12</sup>Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel, <sup>13</sup>so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else...

Everyone knew Paul! We can imagine people saying, “There’s a man in that house who is a Christian, and he does not stop talking or preaching. He is endlessly encouraging those that constantly come to see him..he doesn’t stop! There is something about him that’s different.”

For more on Paul’s “prison letters,” please listen to:



Discovering the profound power of gratitude in the face of adversity



The guards who oversaw Paul’s house arrest allowed visitors to come and go. What an attitude he has! He cannot go where he wants to, and yet he is thrilled because this lockdown has presented an unexpected, tremendous witness for the gospel. Imprisonment would not affect his ability to rejoice!

We were all just locked down from COVID-19 a few years ago. Did we find ways to praise God and witness to the gospel in spite of our limitations?



Paul was a witnessing machine! His captors thought they could keep him quiet, but no –he just found another way! The “most important thing” always remained the most important thing with him. He begins the letter to the Philippians with this profound encouragement.

**He shares the spiritual dilemma of true and mature discipleship:**

Philippians 1:21-22: (NASB) <sup>21</sup>For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. <sup>22</sup>But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose.



Paul did not know if he would be released from prison, or if he would be executed. This is a wonderful dilemma! He is saying, “I really want to be with the LORD in heaven, but if I stay here, there is still such fruitful labor that can be accomplished. I want to be both there and here.”

Paul is talking about either dying or living, and he was okay either way. He just wants to do the will of God, and in either place, in either circumstance, with either result, he can be fruitful and still continue to represent that which he was called to do. He is showing us he considers this spiritual dilemma to be a good thing.

**Having stated confidence in the brotherhood, and having shared his insights on spiritually processing our physical lives, he now admonishes the brotherhood towards unified behavior:**

Philippians 1:27: (NASB) *Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel;*

He is going to begin building a case for unity.

**Continuing with the thought, this unified approach pays particular attention to regarding others within the brotherhood as being above ourselves:**

Philippians 2:2-3: (NASB) <sup>2</sup>Make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. <sup>3</sup>Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves.

Do you want to make the Apostle Paul happy? Here’s how: Have this selfless love to build up one another. Paul sent them his most trusted coworkers to help them keep this oneness of purpose in the spirit.



He is showing the Philippian Christians how much he loves them. He reminds them of his imprisonment. He is talking about this discipleship that will stop at nothing, and he is drawing them into it. He is saying, “You’re like me in this; make my joy complete. I love you so much that I want you to experience the things I am experiencing as I serve Christ, even if it looks bad at this point!”

**He then presses them to have their spiritually-sound behavior extend to those outside the brotherhood as well:**

Philippians 2:14-16: (NASB) <sup>14</sup>*Do all things without grumbling or disputing;* <sup>15</sup>*so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world,* <sup>16</sup>*holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I will have reason to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain.*



Paul is saying we are lights connected to each other that shine in the dark world outside. Do we ever think of appearing as a light in the *crooked and perverse world*? We should because we will represent our Lord better if we do. This is why we are to be distinguished from the world - to have one high standard, no matter our differing circumstances. It is obvious that the faithfulness of the Philippian brethren was incredibly important to Paul. He is provoking them in a positive way.

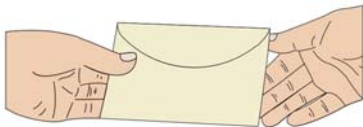
He is putting a challenge to them: “Prove yourselves to be what you say you are.” This is referring to how we think about and process things. *Prove yourselves to be those blameless and innocent children of God that stand differently in a world that is all messed up.*

Our world is messed up, but his world was too. Paul’s message to the Philippians also applies to us here and now. It is a tremendous inspiration to stand for a higher standard even outside the brotherhood where everyone else can see you.

In this context, Paul draws attention to Timothy and Epaphroditus. Please see the [Bonus Material](#) for more on Epaphroditus.

**Both were living testimonies of the highest examples of Christian fellowship to the brotherhood and especially to Paul:**

Philippians 2:19-20: (NASB) <sup>19</sup>*But I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, so that I also may be encouraged when I learn of your condition.* <sup>20</sup>*For I have no one else of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare.*



Those verses were about Timothy, but Paul had another faithful worker. Epaphroditus delivered gifts from the Philippians to Paul during his house arrest, and in return, it is thought that Epaphroditus delivered this letter Paul wrote back to the Philippians.

**Listen to the five qualities of high spiritual maturity Paul attributes to Epaphroditus:**

Philippians 2:25-27: (NASB) <sup>25</sup>*But I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger (this is same word also translated as apostle) and minister to my need;* <sup>26</sup>*because he was longing for you all and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick.* <sup>27</sup>*For indeed he was sick to the point of*



death, but God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, so that I would not have sorrow upon sorrow.

Paul first talks about Timothy who is a kindred spirit..genuinely..concerned for your welfare.

Next he talks about Epaphroditus:

1. brother
2. fellow worker
3. fellow soldier
4. your messenger
5. minister to my (Paul's) need.



Paul is giving the Philippians examples of what he just talked about, showing them true Christianity. They must work together (like Paul, Timothy and Epaphroditus) to achieve this level in their own thinking.

**Paul concludes the first part of his letter with these simple words:**

Philippians 3:1: (NASB) *Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord...*

One might think the letter is going to end here, *Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord*. But he is finishing so he can start again! This *Finally* is saying: here is the basis; here is the foundation.



He has shown them the risks inherent in standing for the gospel, the necessity to be mutually unified, and the witness that such a spiritually-driven life gives to the world around them. He then gave them two shining examples of “all of the above” - Timothy and Epaphroditus.

He now shifts gears from what they can control to what they cannot control and admonishes them to be watchful. He has said up to this point: “Here are the things to aspire to. Focus on this, strive for that. Be stronger, be more focused, realize imprisonment does not have to be a bad thing.”

**Now he is talking about things outside of their control:**

Philippians 3:1-3: (NASB) *<sup>1</sup>Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things again is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you. <sup>2</sup>Beware of the dogs (someone with an impure mind), beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision; <sup>3</sup>for we are the true circumcision, who worship in the spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh...*

We love the way Paul says this, *we (you Philippian brethren and I) are the true circumcision, “we” worship in the spirit of God and glory in Christ...and “we” put no confidence in the flesh.*

He is not saying they have to learn this. He is saying, “I know this is where you are.” He wants to elevate their thinking to continuously higher levels. They already put no confidence in the flesh, but he does not want them to stop there. He wants them to grow and improve.



### THINKING ABOUT THINKING:

A Christian's thought process is to be an observationally-driven process and not an emotionally-driven reaction.

Paul was in prison and observed the good that came from it. He encouraged the Philippian brethren to think about their treatment of each other, their example to the world and to those falsely representing Christ instead of reacting. **LET US THINK BEFORE WE ACT!**

We want our minds to be able to guide us toward being praiseworthy and honorable to God our Father and Jesus our Lord.

The Apostle Paul is being his usual thoughtful and motivational self as he is teaching us how to think. What a great example!

**Paul has laid a foundation of Christian thought and examples, so now what does he build on that foundation?**

As we have seen so many times before, the Apostle Paul was a perceptive, thoughtful, logical and spiritually-sound teacher. His next level of instruction will be along the lines of comparing our earthly lives and their perceived successes with the solid and scripturally sound opportunities we as disciples have in Christ. Again, he will give us something to think about.

Paul's "resume" was very impressive.

- As Saul, he was called a *Hebrew of Hebrews* ([Philippians 3:5](#)).
- He had a religious pedigree as a *Pharisee, son of a Pharisee*; so, he was generationally a Pharisee ([Acts 23:6](#)).
- He was well-educated in the Jewish Law ([Acts 22:3](#)) but also received a classical Roman education.
- As a Roman citizen, he had legal, social and political privileges the other apostles did not, allowing him to go preach throughout the Roman world as *the apostle to the Gentiles* ([Romans 11:13](#)).





**Paul continues building his encouragement towards thoughtful Christianity with pointed comparisons of past successes with the opportunities of Christian enlightenment:**

Philippians 3:7-11: (NASB) <sup>7</sup>*But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. <sup>8</sup>More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ,*

His was a resume of tremendous success, honor and respect within the Jewish community. It is as if he now looks upon those things as being like a little cracked and broken plastic toy instead of the real thing. The real, most valuable thing is a life in Christ. That pedigree and all those honors are *rubbish* in terms of where he is now privileged to be placed and grow.

<sup>9</sup>*and may be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, <sup>10</sup>that I may know him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to his death; <sup>11</sup>in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.*

Notice how in this verse Paul is focusing in on the righteousness of Jesus because Paul did not righteously fulfill the Law.

**TAKE NOTE:**

Paul is focusing on the basis of faith because he had not been truly faithful to what the spirit of the Law said. The power of Jesus' resurrection, the fellowship of his sufferings and being conformed to his death - Paul is focusing on all the costs of being a Christian because he realizes this is the real thing.

This is actually, honestly and genuinely serving God. What he once was (despite being a Pharisee and a doctor of the Law) **WAS NOT SERVING GOD**. But with what God has given him now, he can, he will and he must serve God.

**Paul focuses that thoughtful comparison on the action necessary to attain true Christian reward:**

Philippians 3:12-14: (NASB) <sup>12</sup>*Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.*

Think about it - we have this incredible awareness in what we need to do, which is conforming to Christlikeness. Paul is plainly saying that he is still a work in progress. If he is, so are we!



<sup>13</sup>Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, <sup>14</sup>I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Even the great Apostle Paul had to continue to press on and stay focused, or he could lose his heavenly reward - what the King James Version calls *the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus*.

Again, we see the focus on: “What I currently am is not good enough. I need to work harder. I need to press forward.” In Paul’s previous life, he was pretty good at what he did. He was what everybody liked. Here he is saying that is no longer true. There is something important that requires putting the thought in place, then taking the action of continuing to move forward.

**He next calls us to that same action that he is dedicated to, while warning us to remain observant:**

Philippians 3:17-18: (NASB) <sup>17</sup>Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us. <sup>18</sup>For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ.



Paul is instructing the reader to be careful and follow only those who follow Christ Jesus. Today when we see churchianity pushing tradition, ceremony and many other distractions –we need to be very leery. This is just like what the Pharisees and scribes did (Mark 7:13).

Previously in this third chapter, Paul said there was a lot of pomp and circumstance with what he was. But what he is now is very different.

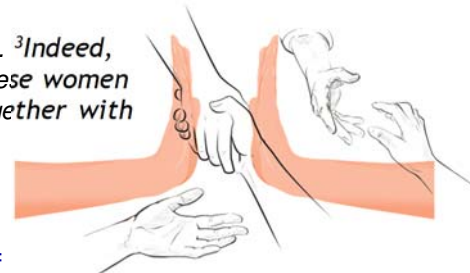
**Paul now gets personal. Our foundation is clear and each of us needs to personally live up to the highest standard:**

Philippians 4:1-3: (NASB) <sup>1</sup>Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown, in this way stand firm in the Lord, my beloved.

Earlier he emphasized how unity was crucial - *Being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit and intent on one purpose*. He is now going to mention an issue that was big enough to reach Paul under house arrest.

**Two women in the church were at odds:**

<sup>2</sup>I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord. <sup>3</sup>Indeed, true companion (likely Epaphroditus), I ask you also to help these women who have shared my struggle in the cause of the gospel, together with Clement also and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.



From these few sentences, we can gather that these women must have had a serious disagreement. Part of their being unified again would include the other church members helping them to achieve it. This is an interesting admonition, but notice he does not dwell on the situation. He addresses it and that is all he needed to say –help them; we move on.





This short mention of names has served its purpose.



**It is now on to briefly recapping some of his most important points and giving his readers a powerful source of spiritual comfort:**

Philippians 4:4-7: (NASB) *<sup>4</sup>Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! <sup>5</sup>Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near. <sup>6</sup>Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. <sup>7</sup>And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

*Rejoice in the Lord always* –not some of the time and not just when things are going our way. Paul lived with an attitude that was ALWAYSrejoicing in the Lord.

We love to read and quote these popular and inspirational verses. But notice how it is in the context of helping these two sisters in Christ “get it together.” They *have shared my struggle in the cause of the gospel* - they were not bad people; they were precious! He wanted them helped so their precious characters could be focused on the right things rather than dissension.

*Let your gentle spirit be known to all men* - when we are at odds with somebody, we do not have a gentle spirit, but this is what we want to achieve. *Be anxious for nothing..let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God..will guard your hearts and your minds* - in a veiled sense he is referring back to those two sisters. But to everybody else, these are the most important things. Do not focus on the problem –focus on the solution, and the unity and spiritual growth that comes from all of that.

Paul now introduces his second ending or “*finally*” of this letter.

**This ending is the beginning of what we are to focus our thinking on as true Christians:**



Philippians 4:8: (NASB) *Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.*



This is one of my top three favorite scriptures. I say this scripture out loud to forcefully redirect my thinking at times when I am angry, nervous, or approaching a temptation. If there is no spiritual excellence, put it away from you.

You take this scripture literally with you, and it comes out when there is a void that needs to be filled very quickly?

That is right –if my mind is thinking the wrong way, saying it out loud redirects me to the right thing.

That is one of the primary reasons we have the written gospel so that we can do that with the Scriptures.

When Paul says, “Finally, I am going to wrap this up,” we need to pay attention! He gives us powerful admonitions to bring with us, to check our hearts and minds so we can rise up higher in a Christlike fashion.

As with so many other scriptural lists the writers of the New Testament have given us, we want to look at this “Dwell on these things” list as somewhat progressive and very connected. The first point helps us see and apply the second point. The second point helps us see and apply the third and so forth. We want to see the connectedness and approach to each statement.

**We have this wonderful list of eight directions to focus our thoughts. Before we start at the beginning, let’s go to the instruction at the very end:**

**Philippians 4:8:** (NASB) *Finally, brethren, whatever is true...**dwell <3049>** on these things.*

**Dwell/Think:** Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance #3049 *logizomai*; to take an inventory, i.e. estimate (literally or figuratively)

The King James Version translates this word “think” 9 times, “impute” 8 times, “reckon” 6 times, “count” 5 times, “account” 4 times, “suppose” 2 times, “reason” 1 time, “number” 1 time, miscellaneous 5 times

Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon: 1) to reckon, count, compute, calculate, count over 1a) to take into account, to make an account of...2) to reckon inward, count up or weigh the reasons, to deliberate...3) by reckoning up all the reasons, to gather or infer



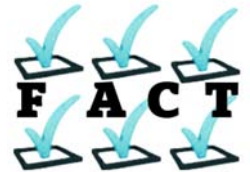
**Thayer’s Greek English Lexicon gives this example::**

This word deals with reality. If I “*logizomai*” or reckon that my bank book has \$25 in it, it has \$25 in it. Otherwise, I am deceiving myself. This word refers to facts, not suppositions.

Facts

This is a word based on fact and not emotional wishes. To *dwell on these things* is like putting them on an Excel spreadsheet - to take an inventory of these things.

Excel spreadsheets have no room for opinions; they contain numbers, facts. They have no room for fantasy or wishes; they are just a recounting of that which is being reported as true. That is how we want to *dwell on these things*. “Inventory” or “take into account” these fundamentally sound ideas that we can count on in our thinking.



**Here are two other examples where this same word *logizomai* is used:**

**Philippians 3:13-14:** (NASB) *<sup>13</sup>Brethren, I **do not regard <3049>** myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, <sup>14</sup>I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of Christ Jesus.*



In other words, I calculate myself to have not gotten there yet. Paul is making a calculated observation of his own life using facts and logic, not emotion.



**1 Corinthians 13:4-5:** (NASB) *<sup>4</sup>Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, <sup>5</sup>does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, **does not take into account <3049>** a wrong suffered.*

Love doesn’t keep inventory of the wrongs others commit.

To *dwell* is to keep inventory, to make note of something sound and powerful. To *dwell on these things* is to put them into the center of our thinking. It is to make them of a highly calculated and proven value. As we look closer, we will see they have intrinsic, powerful foundational value in the mind of any Christian, under any circumstance, at any time in our experience.



### THINKING ABOUT THINKING:

A CHRISTIAN'S THINKING  
IS TO BE INTENTIONAL.

Ideally, it is not to be swayed by the ever-changing circumstances and emotions of life, rather it is to be a focused, calculating and discerning process.

LET US THINK BEFORE WE ACT!

And let us think before we *react*. Let us have that “Excel spreadsheet” of what is sound in our hearts and minds to refer to what we focus on.

The Apostle Paul is setting up a lasting and life-changing approach to spiritual growth and maturity. All we need to do is pay attention and apply what we learn.

**Paul has laid down a broad base of challenges for every Christian to face. How does he encourage us to cope with and overcome them?**

As we have already mentioned, the Apostle Paul will now show us what to build our thought foundation upon. Once established, he will then show us how to systematically build a scripturally-sound Christian thought process.

**The focal points he lays out give us a practical and practicable spiritual perspective we can work on, within and through our daily lives:**

Philippians 4:8: (NASB) *Finally, brethren, whatever is **true <227>**...*

The word for *true/truth* means exactly what it says and is a generally and broadly-used word:

**True/truth:** Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #227 *althes*; true (as not concealing): - true, truly, truth

#225 *altheia*; from #227; truth: - true, truly, truth, verity

#226 *altheuo*; from #227; to be true (in doctrine and profession): - speak (tell) the truth

We understand the apostle to be using this word in a broad sense, setting a foundation for what we should be thinking about.



**Truth is at its very foundation:**

John 8:31-32: (NASB) <sup>31</sup>So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed him, *If you continue in my word, then you are truly disciples of mine; <sup>32</sup>and you will know the **truth <225>**, and the **truth <225>** will make you free.*

*Know the truth* - a broad-based statement about knowing God and the breadth of His plan.

To *dwell upon truth* makes it much easier and more instinctive to speak truth.

**We can speak pearls of wisdom because we are dwelling on God’s truth:**

Ephesians 4:15-16: (NASB) <sup>15</sup>but speaking the **truth <226>** in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into him who is the head, even Christ, <sup>16</sup>from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.



The problem is, how do we determine what is THE truth? These days there is so much false information planted as truth, with Artificial Intelligence poised to add a lot more confusion. Often when we search for truth, we are just filling in the gaps of our own preconceived ideas. But that is just finding comfort in confirming our expectations.

We want truth that is irrefutable - no matter the time in history, our own perspective, or our own experiences. We seek the kind of truth that never changes.



Establishing the differences between "THE truth" and "my truth"

**The truth we are to dwell upon –because it is always true no matter who, why or where - has a transforming power of its own:**

John 17:17-19: (NASB) <sup>17</sup>Sanctify them in the **truth <225>**; *Your word is **truth <225>**.* <sup>18</sup>As *You sent me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.* <sup>19</sup>For their sakes I sanctify myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified (set apart) in **truth <225>**.

**Sanctify:**

To be set apart for a holy purpose



Jesus was praying for all his followers to be “set apart” - *sanctify them in the truth.* This is a big part of what our lives in Christ are supposed to be focused on - the truth of the gospel. Where do we find truth? *Your word is truth.* We go to scriptural guidance in order to find that truth.



There is one source. It is not the traditions of the churches. It is not what we would like it to be. It is not us filling in the gaps. It is the truth of the word of God. Do not try to add to it; do not try to subtract from it. Accept it as it is. *Your word is truth* and has the power to set us apart.



**DO NOT ADD OR SUBTRACT FROM GOD'S TRUTH!**

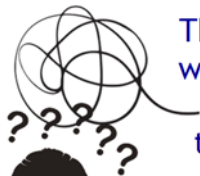


Having God's spirit is a key to abandoning our own reactive ways of looking at spiritual things so we can find and follow God's truth.

**Get rid of the reactions; get into the responses, the well-thought-out approach to the gospel:**

2 Timothy 2:14-15: (NASB) <sup>14</sup>Remind them of these things, and solemnly charge them in the presence of God not to wrangle about words, which is useless and leads to the ruin of the hearers.

In other words, do not get stuck in useless debates. This goes back to what we said earlier about trying to fill in the gaps to prove our own point –it is about God's truth, not trying to reinforce our own truth.



This is a tremendous trap. Especially today, we are living in a time where "my truth" supersedes everything else. That is fundamentally incorrect for the Christian. It is not "my truth" that counts; it is the truth of God through His word.



Why would we get into this idea of trying to *wrangle*? Because we get tied up in our own thinking –we are confusing our truth with God's truth.


Christians can certainly do that. Do NOT think just because we are Christian that everything we think is God's way. It is not.

**We have to rise up a level:**

<sup>15</sup>Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of **truth <225>**.

We are warned not to add or take away from God's word. It is complete within itself (Proverbs 30:5-6). We do not have to be creative –we just have to be attentive! We have to be teachable so that the word of truth can come to us. *Finally, brethren, whatever is true..that is what we are talking about here. Whatever is true..dwell* - take an accounting, an inventory of those things. That is why "truth" is the first thing on this incredible list of mind-focusing points to look at!

**THINKING ABOUT THINKING:**



A MATURE CHRISTIAN'S THOUGHTS WILL ALWAYS STRIVE TO SEE AND RESPOND TO ANY INPUT BASED UPON THE TRUTH OF GOD AND HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS AND NOT AN EMOTIONAL REACTION.

This one result of “*dwell on these things*” provides a fundamental change in how we interact with the world.

LET US THINK BEFORE WE ACT!

And let us think before we *react*.

**Philippians 4:8:** (NASB) <sup>a</sup>*Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is **honorable** <4586>...*

**Honorable:** Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #4586 *semnos*; venerable, i.e., honorable: - grave, honest



(Source: Barnes' Notes on the Whole Bible) Properly, venerable, reverend; then honorable, reputable. The word was originally used in relation to the gods, and to the things that pertained to them, as being worthy of honour or veneration. As applied to men, it commonly means grave, dignified, worthy of veneration or regard.

It is interesting how the Greek word was originally used in relation to their false gods. The world has created a new set of what is true, honorable and just, but God's word is truth. We can't get to *whatever is honorable* until it passes the test of first being *whatever is true*. If it is not true, it is not really honorable –those other gods weren't real and were not worthy of honoring.

“Venerable” reminds us of the recent London coronation of King Charles. Its over-the-top rituals and elaborate ceremony are estimated to have cost \$125 million, partially paid for by ordinary taxpayers. Extravagant kings are nothing new in history, but much of the pomp invoked God and religion. We would think the Apostle Paul would be sick over the gold, the robes, the jewels, the expense –this was not what he meant when he advised the church at Philippi to think on things true and honorable.



This idea of being honorable is a very high level of behavior. Paul is using a word to describe this “venerability,” this commanding of respect, but only in the context of what is true. In the eyes of humanity - with all its perspectives, experiences and opinions - many things may be considered honorable or venerable. This is why the apostle builds upon truth - foundational, godly, scriptural truth. Truth must be first, then look toward that which is honorable or venerable.

All other uses of this word in the New Testament show us the seriousness of being honorable as a Christian character trait.

**For example:**

1 Timothy 3:8: (KJV) *Likewise must the deacons be **grave <4586>**, not doubletongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre.*

1 Timothy 3:11: (KJV) *Even so must their wives be **grave <4586>**, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things.*

Titus 2:2: (KJV) *That the aged men be sober, **grave <4586>**, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience.*

Interestingly, only the Apostle Paul uses this particular Greek word. Since he was the apostle to the Gentiles - the Greeks and Romans - his audience would have understood its meaning. It is also interesting how the other uses of this word were in relation to individuals being honorable.

*Think on these things* – meaning, think on anything which is honorable. Think on those who show godly honor based on godly truth.



**Here is one example of an honorable action. Jesus, when he was silent before his accusers, spoke to the high priest in his own defense only to honor the Law:**

Matthew 26:62-64: (NASB) <sup>62</sup>*The high priest stood up and said to him, Do you not answer? What is it that these men are testifying against you?*<sup>63</sup>*But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest said to him, I adjure you (meaning to extract an oath) by the living God, that you tell us whether you are the Christ, the son of God.* <sup>64</sup>*Jesus said to him, You have said it yourself; nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.*

Jesus would not speak a word in his own defense until he was put under oath under the Jewish Law to speak. He honored the Law even though what he said guaranteed his crucifixion.

He honored that which was highest so the will of God could be accomplished, and so we could look at his example of what is honorable. This is what it means to think on what Jesus did, fulfilling the will and word of God.

### THINKING ABOUT THINKING:



#### A MATURE CHRISTIAN'S THOUGHTS

will seek to "dwell" on the nobility of truly honorable acts that have a solid basis on the righteousness of God's truth.

While it is appropriate to encourage any and all things that tend towards honor, the "dwelling place" for our thoughts is to be on *higher* things.

LET US THINK BEFORE WE ACT!

And let us think before we *react*. The dwelling place for our thoughts need to be on higher things.

We are only introducing this pattern of thinking that Paul is unfolding and it is already showing us a profound step up from our normal reactions.

**Dwelling on that which is true and honorable is a powerful beginning.  
What should our thoughts dwell on from there?**

As the apostle continues to expand this list of spiritually sound qualities of thinking, he will be demonstrating the importance of consistency in thought. It becomes immediately obvious that these qualities must not only remain in what we dwell on, but they must always be at the forefront of what we dwell on.

**Philippians 4:8:** (NASB) *Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is **right <1342>**...*

**Right:** Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #1342 *dikaios*, equitable (in character or act); by implication, innocent, holy (absolutely or relatively)

The King James Version translates this word as "righteous" 41 times, "just" 33 times, "right" 5 times, "meet" 2 times

**This word in similar fashion to the word for truth has a general sense to it:**

**Matthew 23:28:** (KJV) *Even so ye also outwardly appear **righteous <1342>** unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.*

**Acts 10:22:** (KJV) *And they said, Cornelius the centurion, a **just <1342>** man, and one that feareth God, and of good report among all the nation of the Jews...*

These show two different uses of the same word. **Matthew 23:28** negatively describes the Pharisees who *outwardly appear righteous unto men*. **Acts 10:22** positively describes Cornelius, the Roman centurion who was not even Jewish, as being a just man, *one that feareth God, and of good report among all the nation of the Jews*.





The same Greek word is used –once to describe an appearance of righteousness, the other to describe genuine righteousness. But the focus was on that which is equitable, innocent or holy.

(Source: Barnes' Notes on the Whole Bible) *Whatsoever things are just* - The things which are right between man and man. A Christian should be just in all his dealings. His religion does not exempt him from the strict laws which bind men to the exercise of this virtue, and there is no way by which a professor of religion can do more injury, perhaps, than by injustice and dishonesty in his dealings.

There is no easier way to have people doubt Christianity than to see a dishonest minister.

(Source: Bible Commentary by C.T. Russell) Things might be true and honorable, yet not be just or equitable to others. Such must not be entertained, but must be repelled.

This shows us we cannot take any one of these characteristics out and keep it separate from the others. Things can be true and honorable, or true and venerable, but not necessarily just or equitable. We need to put it aside if it does not fit the whole picture. That is not where our minds as Christians are supposed to dwell.

**Jesus gives us a sound basis for equitable behavior but we will not behave this way unless we think this way:**

Matthew 7:12: (NASB) *In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the prophets.*



The famous Golden Rule says: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” It means to be fair in how we treat others.

But we cannot truly treat others that way unless we are thinking in such a way in order not to be hypocritical. There are all kinds of examples of religiousness that hypocritically makes it look like someone is good, honorable and just, but they are not. The point Jesus is making is to act justly as the response of our thinking.



**The Apostle John gives us a practical application of how this equitable thought process can be easily overlooked:**

1 John 3:17-19: (NASB) *<sup>17</sup>But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?<sup>18</sup>Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth. <sup>19</sup>We will know by this that we are of the truth, and will assure our heart before him.*


Notice how truth and being equitable are such a big part of this verse. If we have goods and someone else is going without, but we just move on and look the other way, John is saying we are not living the truth. *Whatever is true..honorable..right (just or equitable)..Dwell on these things.*



Our thoughts are not going out to that individual who may be in need. We are not saying, “Let me help you,” or, “Let me guide you,” or, “Let me teach you how to not be in the position you are in. Let me be a part of your life.” That would be honorable and equitable.

It means stepping out of our own existence, looking around and being willing to give when there is a need. Being just, innocent, holy is such an important Christian principle. God’s plan is built on this. Why would we do anything less than to be right and just? Think about how these fit into the “Dwell...” Let being righteous and just be part of that Excel spreadsheet of things that are solid and sound.

**THINKING ABOUT THINKING:**



WHILE A MATURE CHRISTIAN’S THOUGHTS ARE FOUNDED IN TRUTH AND GRAVITATE TOWARDS THINGS HONORABLE, THEY MUST BE EQUITABLE AS WELL.

This can be tricky as the human mind easily rationalizes towards that which is personally convenient and away from that which upholds godly standards of equity.

**STANDING FOR GOD IS STANDING FOR FAIRNESS.**

**LET US THINK BEFORE WE ACT!**

And let us think before we *react*. Let’s make sure the fairness we look toward is based on godly principles of truth. We can create fairness on all kinds of levels, but it must be based on scriptural principles of truth. *Whatever is..right, think on these things.*

**Philippians 4:8:** (NASB) *Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is **pure** <53>...*

**Pure:** Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance #53 *hagnos*; properly, clean, i.e. (figuratively) innocent, modest, perfect

The King James Version translates this word “pure” 4 times, “chaste” 3 times, “clear” 1 time (Source: Matthew Poole’s Commentary on the Holy Bible) *Pure* - keeping themselves undefiled in the way, Psalm 119:1, from the pollution of sin, 1 John 3:3, and the blemishes of filthy words and deeds, Ephesians 4:29, 5:3-5.

Keep close *whatever is pure* because Christianity is on a different level than the world around us.

**Psalm 119:1:** (NASB) *How blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the Law of the LORD.*



*How blessed are those whose way is blameless* - what does this simple statement mean? It means wherever we go, whatever we do, no one can find fault with us because our actions are pure. If our actions are pure, based on scriptural truth, and have that honorable, venerable sense to them, that sense of being just, think on *whatever is pure* in that area.



If we walk in the *Law of the Lord*, we walk on one path. We are not turning around, reconsidering. There are not five paths in front of us. It is the straight and narrow path of purity. It is not God’s path AND mine. It is HIS path I get to walk on.

(Source: John Gill’s Exposition of the Bible) *whatsoever things are pure* - or "chaste", in words and deeds, in opposition to all filthiness and foolish talking, to obscene words and actions. The Vulgate Latin and Arabic versions render it, "whatsoever things are holy"; which are agreeable to the holy nature, law, and will of God, and which tend to promote holiness of heart and life.

If our minds are set on what is pure, we are not going to participate in something that goes off a little bit this way or that. Politics, for example, quickly goes sour with dishonesty, secrets and self-promotion instead of Christ’s promotion.



It is so easy to fall into because even with good intentions to serve, politics leads one into wanting to have the ear of those in power. With such a connection, we want a say in changing policy (and that is why we went into this, right?). We need to be part of the power structure in order to effect change.

But along with power inevitably comes corruption. Why? Because we are imperfect human beings and purity gets lost in the exhilaration of power. Standing for those things which are pure means standing in a very narrow way. This is the path we were talking about before. It is God’s path, not ours. We must stand for something higher.

Even if we focus on being equitable (our previous point), it does not mean we are always *pure in thought and deed*. Where does true purity come from? We must establish its source. Hint: It doesn’t come from our head, our experiences or some textbook.

**True purity comes from above:**

James 3:16-17: (NASB) <sup>16</sup>For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing. <sup>17</sup>But the wisdom from above is first pure <53>, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy.

Just like our thoughts needs to first be based on God’s unchanging truth, we must base our thoughts of purity on the wisdom of God Himself. We go to the source to find the purest version of anything. Nothing is purer than that which is from God. True purity has to be implemented into our thoughts before our actions.





**In Paul’s first letter to Timothy, he puts personal purity in the broader context of caring for others:**



1 Timothy 5:21-22: (NASB) <sup>21</sup>*I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of his chosen angels, to maintain these principles without bias, doing nothing in a spirit of partiality.* <sup>22</sup>*Do not lay hands upon anyone too hastily and thereby share responsibility for the sins of others; keep yourself **free from sin <53>**.*

We can look at this in two different ways. We can say he is telling him to do this list of things and then, by the way, also keep yourself free from sin. In other words, *keep yourself pure*.

Or we can look at it as, keep yourself pure in doing those things I just explained to you:

-  *Keep yourself pure:* Maintain these principles without bias.
-  *Keep yourself pure:* Do nothing in the spirit of partiality.
-  *Keep yourself pure:* Do not lay hands on anyone (give someone authority) too hastily.
-  *Keep yourself pure:* Rely on the word of God and that which comes from above.

The apostle is teaching Timothy to think, to dwell on, that which is pure in a godly sense.


**True purity needs to be a given when it comes to our Christian mind, heart and actions:**

Ephesians 5:3-5: (NASB) <sup>3</sup>*But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints;* <sup>4</sup>*and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.* <sup>5</sup>*For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.*

We are to dwell on the true purity of godliness, and not a skewed, “my way” version of godliness.

It is said there are five gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John and YOU, and most people will never read the first four. If our thoughts are pure, our actions will follow. If we are representatives of Christ, anything less is false and misleading. We are the only gospel most people will “read.” What are they “reading” when they observe us? Is it the purity of the will of God?

**THINKING ABOUT THINKING:**



A MATURE CHRISTIAN’S THOUGHTS ARE BASED IN TRUTH. HOLD FAST TO THAT WHICH IS HONORABLE AND PRIORITIZE EQUITABLE STANDARDS.

To focus our minds on *purity* is to apply all of these things in a comprehensive sense. Prioritizing pure objects of thought is a significant challenge which *needs to be met with prayerful humility.*

LET US THINK BEFORE WE ACT!

And let us think before we *react*.



We have been giving a basis for dwelling on what kinds of things will change our Christian lives, putting in perspective what is true, honorable, right and pure.

In Part II, we will finish this “Dwell on these things” list: *Whatever is lovely, of good repute, if there is any excellence, if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. Dwell on these things.*

Making these things the viable basis of all our thinking is the pathway to faithfulness.



**Philippians 4:8:** (NASB) *Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.*



***We are what we think about, so what are we thinking about?  
For Jonathan, Rick, Julie and Christian Questions...  
Think about it..!***

All quoted scriptures are from the 1995 version of NASB unless otherwise indicated.



**Next**  
**PODCAST**

Join us next week for our podcast on May 22, 2023  
Ep. 1282: We Are What We Think About,  
So What Are We Thinking About? (Part II)

**Bonus Material and Study Questions**

Here is a little background on Epaphroditus.

(Source: James Burton Coffman) EPAPHRODITUS- Certainly Epaphroditus was a spiritual leader at Philippi, probably one of the elders. He had been commissioned by the church there to bring a gift of money to Paul and to remain with him for an unspecified time to look after Paul’s needs and to assist in any way possible. While engaged in that service, he became dangerously ill, possibly from attending Paul during an illness, or from over-exertion. The friends of Epaphroditus in Philippi heard of his illness, and became concerned and anxious regarding his condition.

God graciously restored him to health. As was quite natural, he wanted to return to Philippi as soon as he became able to travel. Paul, in complete accord, sent him back, probably as the bearer of this letter, and heaping praise and commendation upon him as in the passage before us.

# Study QUESTIONS

## Ep. 1281: We Are What We Think About, So What Are We Thinking About? (Part 1)

See:  CQRewind  
SHOW NOTES

<https://christianquestions.com/character/1281-christian-thinking-i/>

1. How often was the Apostle Paul imprisoned by Rome? What did he do during his first arrest? Did Paul know the brethren at Philippi? What was his relationship with them? (See Philippians 1:6-11)
2. What was Paul's perspective during his first imprisonment? What were the conditions of his arrest? How did he act during imprisonment? What was his dilemma? How did Paul characterize our role within the world? What was his challenge to the Philippian brethren and to us? (See Philippians 1:12-16, 21-22)
3. What were the qualities Timothy and Epaphroditus exhibited as examples of Christian brotherhood? What was the "thinking about thinking" lesson for this segment? (See Philippians 2:19-20 25-27)
4. Why was Paul's "resume" impressive? How did Paul feel about the honors from his earlier life? What was his new focus? What is his warning in Mark 7:1-23? How does this apply to us today? (See Philippians 3:5-14, Acts 22:3, 23:6, Romans 11:13)
5. Explain Philippians 4:1-7 in the context of the two women who were at odds with each other. What was the responsibility of the other members of the church in this incident? Dissect verses 4-7. How do you live with an attitude that continuously rejoices in the Lord, even during trials?

Philippians 4:8 – how do we build our Christian foundation on the following:

6. *Dwell on these things* – what is the significance of the word *dwell*?
7. What advantage does *dwelling on God's truth* give us? What kind of truth do we seek? Where do we find it? How should it affect us? (John 8:31-32, Ephesians 4:15-16, John 17:17-19, 2 Timothy 2:14-15)
8. Can something be considered *honorable* but not be based on God's truth? Where is the dwelling place of our thoughts? How do you accomplish this in your life?
9. What is a practical way to *dwell on what is right, or equitable*? (See 1 John 3:17-19)
10. Why do we need *to keep close to that which is pure*? Where do we find purity? How do we dwell on true purity? (See James 3:16-17, 1 Timothy 5:21-22, Ephesians 5:3-5)
11. How are you dwelling in truth, staying honorable in your actions, standing for what is right and holding close to purity of thought? How can you improve?