



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

**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.*



As a Christian, taking the time to understand what we think about is a worthy and necessary investment of our time and effort. When we look at anyone who is truly successful at any endeavor, we will always find that one of the common denominators of their success is controlling their minds. In Part I of this two-part series, we spent considerable time piecing together the groundwork that the Apostle Paul laid out as a basis for productive Christian thinking. He understood the demands of Christianity and cared enough about his fellow disciples to teach us not only what he knew, but how to apply that knowledge. One major result of his spiritual wisdom was the letter he wrote to the Philippians.



Paul wrote this letter while under Roman house arrest, so it is one of the "prison letters" which includes Philippians, Ephesians, Colossians and Philemon. In this letter to the Philippians, he focuses on the necessity of thinking about and processing all our experiences on a spiritually-mature level and not through our emotions or our own human conclusions.

Let's review several important points from the first two chapters of Philippians:

- 📖 Paul expressed his confidence in his brethren within the context of his own imprisonment.
- 📖 He shared his spiritually positive perspective in spite of his physically limiting experience under house arrest.
- 📖 He revealed a significant spiritual dilemma of true and mature discipleship, wanting to be with Jesus in heaven and with the Philippians at the same time.
- 📖 He then admonished the brotherhood towards unified behavior.
- 📖 In our unity, he taught us to respect those in the brotherhood as being above ourselves.
- 📖 He urged us to have this spiritually sound behavior extend outside of the brotherhood.
- 📖 As examples, Paul drew attention to Timothy and Epaphroditus. Both were living testimonies to all of the highest example of Christian brotherhood, and especially to Paul himself.

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

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

Chapters three and four get personal and practical as Paul focuses us on our thinking:

- 📖 Paul shifted gears from what we can control to those things we cannot control and admonished us to be watchful.
- 📖 Paul then gave pointed examples of his own past levels of perceived success and compared them with the present opportunities of Christian enlightenment.
- 📖 He focused that thoughtful comparison on actions that were necessary to attain true Christian reward.
- 📖 He called us to the same action that he was dedicated to, while warning us to remain observant.
- 📖 Paul then got personal. With the principles of our Christian foundation clearly stated, he explained how each of us needs to personally and individually live up to these highest of standards.
- 📖 After briefly naming names, Paul went on to briefly recap some of his most important points of Christian thought and life as he gave his readers powerful spiritual comfort.
- 📖 Paul introduces his second “ending” of this letter starting with the concluding word - *Finally*. 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 a list of eight directions in which to focus our thoughts. This list and its examples form the basis of our understanding.

Let’s review the “how” before we review the “what”:

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

The key to everything is to dwell on these things. This is not a matter of saying, “Oh, these things are very nice,” or “This is inspiring me,” or “I like this!” That is all good, but to dwell on these things is to develop a deep connection with the practicality and reasonableness of these things. It is not emotion; it is clarity of thought. We used the example of an Excel spreadsheet last week. An Excel spreadsheet contains solid and true facts. If we dwell on and recognize these facts as true, they become absolute guiding principles - not feelings - in our Christian walk.



## 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!

Before doing a quick review of that which is *true, honorable, right and pure*, let's add another dimension to *dwell on these things*.

Heads up - we are going to peel back this onion of calming phrases to see how vital this list of eight things is to our Christian walk.

Romans 12:1-2: (NASB) <sup>1</sup>Therefore...



Wait, hold on! What's the *therefore* there for? When a verse starts out this way, it is telling us that because of what was just said, we now can base these next statements upon what we have learned. In Romans 11, the Apostle Paul was talking to the Gentile converts who were called to follow Jesus. Paul warns them to be merciful to others based on this gift and to not look down on the Israelites that lost the privilege to represent Messiah (Christ). The nation of Israel rejected him, so the Gentiles were invited in to become followers and representatives of Messiah. Paul warned the Gentiles that if they became conceited with an improper attitude, this favor could be taken away from them too. For those Gentiles who had been shown mercy, it was necessary they show mercy back to those who lost mercy. God will once again (and has in our lifetimes) shown mercy to Israel, and there is more mercy to come.

*...I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.*

These short scriptures tell us a lot. He calls them brethren - *I urge you, brethren*. This is not a calling for sinners to repentance, but repentant sinners who have already accepted Jesus as their Savior.



*Present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice* - this goes way beyond just believing in Jesus. There is an action required, and one that will not come naturally, hence the urging. Living a sacrificial life - giving up our will to do that which God and Jesus would have us to do - is the required action of the *new creature*.

2 Corinthians 5:17: (KJV) *Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.*

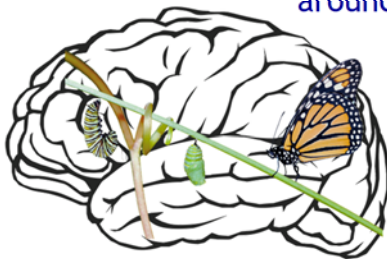
This is about changing what our entire existence is all about. Though we are called *to present our bodies a living sacrifice*, it is unnatural. We do not hear a lot of people exclaiming, "Choose ME to be a living sacrifice!" As human beings, we want what we want - we do not want to sacrifice what we own or do. This calling is higher than living on the human plane.



Because this is a completely unnatural objective, the Apostle Paul gives us some "how to" advice:

<sup>2</sup>*And do not be conformed (do not be patterned after) to this world, but be **transformed** <3339> by the **renewing** <342> of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.*

*Do not be conformed; be transformed.* The alternative to conforming is transforming. That transformation work begins in our minds. Our hearts must accept that this is something we want for our lives, but our minds are what form this desire into an actionable process. It is the idea of changing our lives around to something quite different.



**Transformed**: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #3339 *metamorphoo*; to transform (literally or figuratively, "metamorphose") - change, transfigure, transform

Our English word "metamorphosis" comes from this Greek word. In English, it means the transformation of one thing into something greater, like the common example of a young caterpillar to a butterfly, changing its entire shape and body structure. Heat turns coal into diamonds. This is a complete change.

For the Christian, it is also a complete change. We submit ourselves to the will of God to be transformed through the word of God. Our minds, goals, ambitions, character - everything is being transformed and being set on heavenly things. 1 Corinthians 2:16 calls this having *the mind of Christ*.



What changed for me when I was introduced to Romans 12:1-2 was this: I knew instantly my lifestyle had to change. I looked at Jesus, our perfect pattern, and saw what he gave up. I first took inventory of who I was and how I lived. I needed a radical change. I came from a very worldly and selfish life. At the age of 26, I had never grown up. This was a wakeup call. I had to learn what was right and wrong from God's word. I purged out the things that were inappropriate from my house. I had to stop partying and singing in nightclubs and I had to cut off business ties with a friend because it had immoral implications. Everyone who knew me thought I went off the deep end.

All except my parents! They were overjoyed. And they even came to my baptism to support me. My life in Christ is the best decision I ever made.



Jonathan did go off the deep end because that is where service to others and a life of Christ is - you cannot feel the bottom, but have to rely entirely on Jesus. Jonathan's life is an awesome example of this scripture.

*This transformation is the gradual bending heavenward of that which naturally bends earthward. In this way, we are made new creatures by the holy spirit of God.*

*Metamorphoo* only appears a few times in the New Testament - here in Romans 12:2, and in Matthew and Mark regarding Jesus' transfiguration.

### Jesus' transfiguration:

Mark 9:2: (KJV) *And after six days Jesus taketh with him Peter, and James, and John, and leadeth them up into a high mountain apart by themselves: and he was **transfigured** <3339> before them.*



We know this was a vision because it says so in the context. In the vision, Jesus was entirely changed from a physical being to a spiritual being - a complete transformation.

### The only other place this word is used:

2 Corinthians 3:18: (KJV) *But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are **changed** <3339> into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the spirit of the Lord.*

Again, this is our complete and utter change as from caterpillar into butterfly. It does not mean we drag along what we were. This is about being unrecognizable from what we were, because we are now something higher and better.

Remember what we read in Romans 12:2 - by the **renewing** <342> of your mind.

**Renewing**: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #342 *anakainosis*; renewing

Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon: a renewal, renovation, complete change for the better

### The only other use of this word:

Titus 3:5: (NASB) *...not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and **renewing** <342> by the holy spirit.*

The Greek word for *transformed* only appears when referring to Jesus (on the Mount of Transfiguration) or the *new creation* (Romans 12:2). The Greek word for *renewing* only appears when referring to the holy spirit (Titus 3:5) or the *new creation* (Romans 12:2). These words are used very rarely in the Bible and never in a casual way. They are pointed and purposeful.



### THINKING ABOUT THINKING:

A CHRISTIAN'S ENTIRE LIFE IS BUILT UPON SACRIFICING OUR OWN WILL TO DO THE WILL OF GOD.

This absolutely comes down to our minds being renovated by us allowing God's spirit to take control. No wonder Paul was so straightforward about dwelling on appropriate things! LET US THINK BEFORE WE ACT!

It is obvious that thinking along spiritually sound lines is not only a big deal, but it is a necessary life-changing practice.

**With the deep necessity of renovating our minds before us, what are those things we need to dwell upon?**

Our need for self-control is critical and cannot be overstated. Romans 12:2 describes a transformation every true Christian must subject themselves to. As we have already seen, at the core of this transformation is God's spirit. Here's the catch - we individually control the measure of influence God's spirit can have. We can stifle God's spirit in our lives, or we can welcome God's spirit as a director into our lives. Is our thinking holy spirit friendly?

If we do not allow God's power to work in and through our lives, then that complete change - that complete transformation in our minds, goals, ambitions and character - will not happen. Less of "self" and more of God should be our goal. Paul encouraging us to *dwell on these things* is more than giving us nice sayings to hang on our refrigerator (which might be how we view them when we first read them).



There are a lot of thoughts that are not bad, but they will not fit into these broad categories. For example, I am planning my grocery list or someone else is studying for a test in college, or listening to a friend talking about what is bothering her. Where does our regular life fit into this "dwelling"?



We are to dwell on these spiritual things, but that does not mean we do not acknowledge the "worldly," everyday things we need to be dealing with. We are actually going to get into that in great detail coming up. When we understand how to do both, it unlocks true Christianity.



Let's review the four pieces we discussed in our last episode:

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

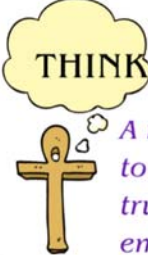
The word for *true/truth* is a very general and broadly used word.



The truth that we are to dwell upon has a transforming power of its own: John 17:17: (NASB) *Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.*

Our dwelling in the truth of the word of God, our making that a basic principle - not just a feeling but a principle of transformation - is what helps us to put everything else in its place. It is so critical for us to tell ourselves: "I must dwell in God's truth."

**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.*

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

We talked about being *honorable* in Part I, which includes the thought of "venerable."

We are told to *dwell on things* that are *honorable*, and we are also instructed to BE honorable.



Merriam Webster Online Dictionary:  
**VENERABLE**: (adjective)  
 a: calling forth respect through age, character, and attainments  
 b: impressive by reason of age




1 Timothy 3:8: (KJV) *Likewise must the deacons be **grave** <4586>...*

1 Timothy 3:11: (KJV) *Even so must their wives be **grave** <4586>...*

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

Being *honorable* (*grave* in the King James Version) is an important character trait. It sets us apart from the average carelessness of how we present ourselves. Being honorable is not acting carelessly.

**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.*

We want a solid basis on the righteousness of what is true in God's eyes, not our own.

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

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

This word is similar to the word for *truth* and means it is true in a general way.

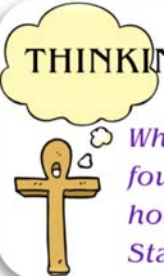
Jesus gives us a sound basis for equitable behavior, but we will not behave this way unless we think this way:

**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.*



Jesus laid it out simply. We are to be that person who is always equitable and an example to others. We dwell on living up to this high standard.

**THINKING ABOUT THINKING:**



*While a mature Christian's thoughts are founded in truth and gravitate towards things honorable, they must be equitable as well. Standing for God is standing for fairness.*

So far, we have looked at *whatever is true, whatever is honorable and whatever is right* (just or equitable).

These are three of the basic foundations of what we should be dwelling on in our minds.

Let's examine the fourth:

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

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

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

**Ephesians 5:3-4:** (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.*

This idea of purity is built upon what we were discussing in the last segment. Remember we were talking about *be transformed by the renewing of your minds*. This renovation of our minds, the way we think, brings us to a level of purity that most people do not even want to think about. But that is where we need to rest our thoughts. It is such an important developmental process.



### 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.*

These are the four aspects we went through in Part I of our series: *whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure.*

Let's move on to the next instructions to *dwell on these things.*

**Philippians 4:8:** (NASB) *Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely <4375>...*

**Lovely:** Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #4375 *prospbiles*; from a presumed compound of 4314 and 5368; friendly towards, i.e. acceptable: — lovely

This Greek word is only used once in the Bible - here in Philippians 4:8.

Jesus observed and appreciated the goodness and acceptability in others even if it was not fully developed.



**An example of this is found in the rich young ruler speaking with Jesus:**

**Mark 10:20-21:** (NASB) <sup>20</sup>*And he said to him, Teacher, I have kept all these things from my youth up. <sup>21</sup>Looking at him, Jesus felt a love for him and said to him, One thing you lack: go and sell all you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.*

This is a wonderful example because we are talking about things that are lovely and things that are beautiful. Jesus saw beauty even in the broken characters of humanity because he saw their intention - he saw where their heart was. The rich young ruler had a wonderful heart! Jesus knew before the conversation started where it was going to end. But the account in Mark says he gave him a lesson because he loved him. The young man was not complete. He was not fully developed. It says he went away very sorrowful because he had great riches. But Jesus paused in his day to teach him because of the beauty of his character. This is a great example from Jesus of finding that which is wonderful and beautiful among broken humanity.



**What things are lovely? What can we be friendly towards? What things are acceptable?**



**We can and should observe and dwell upon the powerful harmony and beauty around us:**

**Psalms 8:1,3-4:** (NASB) <sup>1</sup>*O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is Your name in all the earth, Who have displayed Your splendor above the heavens! <sup>3</sup>When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, The moon and the stars, which You have ordained; <sup>4</sup>What is man that You take thought of him, and the son of man that You care for him?*



When we look at the exquisite intricacies of nature, whether we look up into the heavens, down under the sea and everywhere in between, it reinforces Psalm 14:1 that *only the fool has said in his heart, "There is no God."*

Such beauty in design and function should produce awe, which brings reverence for our heavenly Father, so *dwell on these things*.

We recently read an article at AtlasObscura.com called, *How the Best Underwater Photography Reveals a World of Wonder*. The pictures will make you weep of the fluorescent lizardfish that looks like he's made of glow-in-the-dark paint, a Fan Worm that rivals anything the greatest artist could draw, and the impossible detail of a nurse shark's eye. Some of these obscure creatures are just being photographed for the first time. God cared enough to create this magnificent earth for us. It is lovely and we should *dwell* on it.

<https://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/best-underwater-photography-awards>

The amazing thing about some of those examples is that nobody has ever seen them. And yet they are not just shades of gray; they are brilliantly colored. Just because they are out of sight does not mean they are out of the glorious creativity of God Almighty. You see His signature even on the things which are never seen. *Dwell on these things*, and see the goodness of God's creation. Pause, stop, dwell and make it a principle of action for our lives.



**We can and should observe and dwell upon the beauty of our human family:**

Mark 10:13-14,16: (NASB) <sup>13</sup>*And they were bringing children to him so that he might touch them; but the disciples rebuked them. <sup>14</sup>But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, Permit the children to come to me; do not hinder them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. <sup>16</sup>And he took them in his arms and began blessing them, laying his hands on them.*

When we see this example of Jesus with the little children, we must pause and consider little children in their innocence and in their beauty.



Trish and I are blessed to have five grandchildren. The youngest is two-and-a-half, the oldest, Dominic, is 15-and-a-half. There is a big range of years between them. Dominic is now taller than I am. Of course, that is not saying a whole lot, but he is taller than me. It is a really big accomplishment in our family when you get to be taller than me, and he just loves to come up to me and put his arm around my shoulder, "How you doing, Papa?" I have to look up to him! It is such a beautiful moment. Then you go down to the youngest one, little Lianna. At two-and-a-half, she has spunk like you would not believe. She'll give you that eye, but when we start to play with her, there is this beauty of that little innocent imagination. Jesus saw it. *Dwell* on the beauty of human nature, especially in its innocence. It is such a valuable, inspiring thing to look at and to appreciate. God made us this way. Let's *dwell on it*.



**We can and should observe and dwell upon the Christlikeness in our brethren:**

**1 Corinthians 2:1-2:** (NASB) *1And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. 2For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified.*

Paul says at the very beginning of Corinthians that he is going to be scolding them through the entire letter because they are making all kinds of trouble. But then he says, I am determined to know you only in the way of Christ. This is why he scolded them - because he loved them so much. He saw the beauty of Christ in them and wanted to protect that beauty. He cared enough to help them put things back in order in the church. This is the way we need to see the brotherhood. We need to see Christ in them first and foremost. By the way, we are not apostles, so we should not be doing the scolding like the Apostle Paul did, but we should see the beauty of Christ in them as he did.



I call my wife, Jewel, "Lovely." She's lovely on the inside and out - her new creature is beautiful. She loves God, Jesus and the brotherhood. She wants to give to others. She is selfless. She loves her family and is always trying to show that love to her son and daughter-in-law. She is my gift from God and I am so grateful for her. She usually goes to bed before me, so when I get in bed, before I go to sleep, I say, "I love you, Lovely."

Again, Paul admonishes us to *dwell*, and Jonathan dwells on the beauty he finds within Jewel. Remember, this Greek word to *dwell* means "to take an inventory, to make an account of." We are to put these things into the center of our thinking. We make them of a highly calculated value. This word is not used for fleeting emotions or happy feelings. It is vital for our metamorphosis from that old man to a *new creature in Christ*.

We want to dwell on *whatever is lovely* in the context of God's creation and God's order. That is where the greatest loveliness can exist. *Dwell on these things.*

**THINKING ABOUT THINKING:**



A CHRISTIAN'S THINKING IS TO BE FOCUSED ON THE BEAUTIFUL THINGS WE ARE SURROUNDED WITH.

This should always be done with purity of heart and mind so we can truly appreciate the beauty that surrounds us that is God-reflective.

LET US THINK BEFORE WE ACT!

Appreciating the beauty that surrounds us is God-reflective. This gives us a focal point of where to go and where not to go with our focus. If we would only stop to observe, we would quickly see that the beauty of God's handiwork is all around us!



So far, our dwelling places are upon what is true, honorable, right, pure and now lovely or beautiful. What comes next?

There is one more dwelling place for our thoughts on this list from the Apostle Paul, after which are two qualifiers. This last item absolutely has to be applied within the context of what Paul has already said because it can be far too easy to think on things of a worldly nature and be ever so subtly distracted from truly mature spiritual thinking.



**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 <2163>...*

**Good Repute:** Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #2163 *euphemos*; well-spoken of, i.e. reputable: — of good report

Who doesn't want a good report card?

We are going to interchange with the more-common phrase *good report* from the King James Version.



This is the only time this word is used in the New Testament. We want to focus on the apostle's meaning and how we can dwell in an appropriate way on things *of good report*.

(Source: Albert Barnes' Notes on the Whole Bible) *Whatsoever things are of good report. That is, whatsoever is truly reputable in the world at large. There are actions which all men agree in commending, and which in all ages and countries are regarded as virtues. Courtesy, kindness, respect for parents, purity between brothers and sisters, are among those virtues - and the Christian should be a pattern and an example in them all. His usefulness depends much more on the cultivation of these virtues than is commonly supposed.*



Why, when the world is so evil, would we want to look to what is around us for the example of a good report? Shouldn't we stick with only what the Bible tells us?



We want to support things that are *of good report*, but we need to be careful to differentiate between acknowledging and dwelling on these things. There is a big difference between acknowledging something good in a worldly sense and perhaps dwelling upon it inappropriately as a Christian. We want to focus on ACKNOWLEDGE versus DWELL. When Paul says *dwell on these things*, he is talking about the core value everything comes back to.

Acknowledge  
VS  
Dwell

How do we decide which category something *of good report* belongs in? To do that, let us go back over these six virtuous things we have discussed so far.





## Comparing acknowledging and dwelling:



If it is *true* by worldly standards, acknowledge it.  
If it is *true* by godly standards,  dwell upon it.

We pause and consider:

If by worldly standards - acknowledge its goodness and say, "That's good."  
If by godly standards - pause, consider and allow our life to rely on this.



If it is *honorable* by worldly standards, acknowledge it.  
If it is *honorable* by godly standards,  dwell upon it.

We pause and consider:

If by worldly standards - acknowledge and say, "I'm glad to see that."  
If by godly standards - we can bank on that level of honor.



If it is *just* by worldly standards, acknowledge it.  
If it is *just* by godly standards,  dwell upon it.

We pause and consider:

If by worldly standards - "We are glad to see justice in the world!"  
If by godly standards - "We can count on God's justice for eternity!"



If it is *pure* by worldly standards, acknowledge it.  
If it is *pure* by godly standards,  dwell upon it.

We pause and consider:

If by worldly standards - these have levels of purity, but are generally a bit contaminated as well. But it is good to see any purity.  
If by godly standards - we rest that this purity is 100 percent free of any contamination!



If it is *lovely* by worldly standards, acknowledge it.  
If it is *lovely* by godly standards,  dwell upon it.

We pause and consider:

If by worldly standards - we appreciate the beautiful things in this world.  
If by godly standards - not only do we appreciate, but we keep it in our hearts and minds all the time, and praise God as we do.



If it is *of good report* by worldly standards, acknowledge it.  
If it is *of good report* by godly standards,  dwell upon it.

We pause and consider:

If by worldly standards - if this is something of real, true intrinsic value, we can applaud it as a wonderful thing.  
If by godly standards - keep it there and say, "This is what guides me."

The point is, if we lose our ability to acknowledge what is good in the world, we lose our compassion. There is a difference between acknowledging and dwelling. We can appreciate such activities, but they are not the focus of our lives.



We also acknowledge the mundane but necessary activities of our lives, such as the previously-given grocery list example.

What are we sacrificing for? We are sacrificing to help Jesus bless all of humanity in the kingdom. If we start to look for the good all around us, it is easier to communicate with others and to appreciate them.

An example in the natural sense is to appreciate those who have a calling to serve in the military. We appreciate and acknowledge their service and sacrifice for freedom's sake, but we, as followers of Christ, dwell on the spiritual soldiers of Christ. We support, encourage and give of ourselves to their spiritual development, even if we see things differently. Dwell on their talents and goodness because we are all unique.

A good example of that which is *of good report* and fits all of the above criteria is found in Acts 15. The elders met at the Jerusalem Conference and, among other things, discussed circumcision versus non-circumcision for Jewish Christians versus Gentile Christians.



There is a major debate going on here which fits very well into the first six aspects of our theme scripture:

Acts 15:7-11: (NASB) <sup>7</sup>After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, Brethren, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and believe. <sup>8</sup>And God, who knows the heart, testified to them giving them the holy spirit, just as He also did to us; <sup>9</sup>and He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith.

Peter sums this up as a godly report. After all, God gave the Gentiles the holy spirit too. There was no difference between Jewish and Gentile Christians.



<sup>10</sup>Now therefore why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? <sup>11</sup>But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are.

Peter is saying to dwell on the unity and entirety of the body of Christ.

In Part I, we quoted Paul expecting a good report from the church at Philippi:

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;

Dwelling on the unity and quality of the body of Christ brings spiritual reverence. Since we are representing Christ, we ourselves want to be *of good report*. We need to dwell where we need to dwell, and be aware of what is appropriate and what is not.

### THINKING ABOUT THINKING:



A CHRISTIAN'S THINKING NEEDS TO BE TRAINED TO ALWAYS LOOK TO HIGHER AND SPIRITUAL STANDARDS TO GUIDE WHAT THEY DWELL UPON.

Because the world is overwhelmed with people's interpretations of what a "good report" can be, we need to have a sound system of spiritual checks and balances in place to guide us to appropriate thought dwelling places. LET US THINK BEFORE WE ACT!

It is important to establish appropriate thought dwelling places; *dwell on that which is of good report from a spiritual perspective.*

**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 <703>...*

**Excellence:** Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #703 *arete*; from the same as 730; properly manliness (valor), i.e. excellence (intrinsic or attributed)

Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon: 1) a virtuous course of thought, feeling and action  
1a) virtue, moral goodness 2) any particular moral excellence, as modesty, purity

The focus here is slightly different. Paul now broadens his approach, and in a more general way says *excellence* can also be a dwelling place for our thoughts.

These next two (*excellence* and *worthy of praise*) seem like a good "catch-all" - anything virtuous, of value or worthy of praise - we are to spend time elevating ourselves and transforming ourselves with these kinds of thoughts.



The Apostle Peter explains to us that any true excellence we may develop is fashioned after the excellence of God our Creator:

**2 Peter 1:3,5-7:** (NASB) <sup>3</sup>seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and *excellence <703>*. <sup>5</sup>Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral *excellence <703>*, and in your moral *excellence <703>*, knowledge, <sup>6</sup>and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, <sup>7</sup>and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love.

What a great progression! This is the highest standard of excellence, as God's excellence called us, and now we are called upon to develop excellence within ourselves. We become excellent after the manner of God. That we even have such an opportunity is hard to fathom.

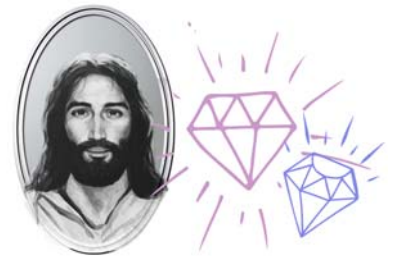


It is an example that we can barely get our arms around because it is the excellence of God that is the model of excellence. When it says *if there is any excellence in Philippians 4:8*, this is the high model with which we are beginning.

**Peter also gives us the highest human example of the kind of excellence we are to dwell upon:**

1 Peter 2:4-5: (NASB) *<sup>4</sup>And coming to him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God, <sup>5</sup>you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*

In every way, Jesus' life was stellar. His demeanor, his words, his actions, his sensitivity and his forcefulness. He fulfilled the law flawlessly. As we are called living stones like he was, we want our excellence to shine by mirroring him. We are being developed to be precious stones, gems cut and polished through trials and testings. Will God see excellence in us? That is our hope. How's our transformation coming?



When we think about Jesus, we feel a little defeated in following his example in that he was perfect. But the scripture says, *he learned obedience by the things that he suffered*, by the things he experienced. "Perfect" does not mean "experienced." Perfect required development, and we need the same. Jesus is our pattern. He was *a living stone*; we are *also living stones*.

**Jesus' own excellence gives us the pattern for us to develop our own godly excellence:**

1 Peter 2:9, 11-12: (NASB) *<sup>9</sup>But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession so that you may proclaim the excellencies <703> of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. <sup>11</sup>Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul. <sup>12</sup>Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.*

We talked a lot about these specific descriptions - a *chosen race*, a *royal priesthood* and so on in Episode #1249. It is well worth a closer examination.




Absorbing the many inheritances and responsibilities of heaven

In short, we receive privilege upon privilege *so that you may proclaim the excellencies of God*. We cannot proclaim them unless we are dwelling on them. It is not complicated, but the magnitude of privilege and responsibility is profound.

*Be not conformed to this world, be transformed by the renewing of your mind.* These are the things that transform us as we renew our minds. Dwell on those things which are excellent from a godly standard.



**THINKING ABOUT THINKING:**



A MATURE CHRISTIAN'S THINKING MUST FIND ITS FUEL IN THE EXCELLENCE OF GOD OUR CREATOR AND JESUS OUR LORD.

Excellence and virtue can and do abound in many people for many reasons and we always want to be aware of it and support it. However, we cannot forget the WHY of our seeking such virtue as it is to simply and eternally praise and honor God. Dwell on spiritual excellence. LET US THINK BEFORE WE ACT!

We really do need to think before we act. We have to develop the perspective to be able to say, "This is excellent on a level that I need to strive for," or "That is excellent and I can appreciate it, but this is where I want to live."

There is a clarity developing in Paul's teaching that helps us separate our old lives from our new calling. Let's take his advice.

**We now know that our observance of excellence gives us an even broader base upon which to have our thoughts dwell. What else is there?**

The Apostle Paul knows he is teaching us life-changing thought processes, and he knows he is doing it with just a few words. He has given us this very dynamic list of what to dwell on and has added excellence. He is not done yet, as there is one more quality that will round out all that he is teaching. In some ways, this next quality will circle us back to the list's beginning. What was at the beginning? *Whatsoever is true*. Think about what we are about to talk about in the context of *whatsoever is true*.



**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 <1868>...*

**Praise:** Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #1868 *epainos*; laudation; concretely, a commendable thing; - praise

This is pretty simple. Something that is commendable - and there are lots of things in the world that are praiseworthy. But, again, this is a matter of standards as we have been really working on and trying to absorb what the apostle is teaching us.



Many things can seem praiseworthy but are not. One example is praise that is not based on truth.

The context of the following verses is talking about those who saw Jesus, especially the rulers in Israel who saw him - but maybe didn't quite so much follow him for some reasons.





**John 12:42-43:** (NASB) <sup>42</sup>*Nevertheless many even of the rulers believed in him, but because of the Pharisees they were not confessing him, for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue;* <sup>43</sup>*for they loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God.*

We seem to always pick on these poor Pharisees, but for good reason. They loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God. Isn't that sad to say about any religious leader? They rejected the opportunity to follow Jesus because THEY wanted to be praised as the ones who had all the answers. Their wanting such praise was not based on the truth of what was happening right in front of them.

The Apostle Paul was one of those very Pharisees. Later in his life, he understood this. Earlier in the book of Philippians, he talked about all his previous perceived successes as a Pharisee were only worthy to be thrown in the garbage heap because they were not based in the truth of God's righteousness.

This was an entirely different level of praiseworthy, and it was not praiseworthy to conform to what the religious leadership was saying.



**Another example is approaching our spiritual calling with our old human habits present as a driving influence:**

**1 Corinthians 11:20-22:** (NASB) <sup>20</sup>*Therefore when you meet together, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper,* <sup>21</sup>*for in your eating each one takes his own supper first; and one is hungry and another is drunk.* <sup>22</sup>*What! Do you not have houses in which to eat and drink? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I **praise** you? In this I will not **praise** you.*

In other words, don't take the sacredness of spirituality and bring your old broken selves into it. Come as you are, but don't stay as you are. Too many churches that want to be accepting will do the very opposite. In principle, they say, "Come as you are, you're okay just the way you are." But it is not okay from the apostle's standpoint. He was telling the Gentiles that bringing in their old habits was polluting the church. Here's the point: There is no transformation in that process. This is not praiseworthy.

Looking back at Jonathan's personal example of people saying he "went off the deep end" - Christianity belongs in the deep end. Some brands of Christianity stay in the shallow end because everybody is comfortable there. They can touch the bottom. But we do not want to be on the bottom! We want to be floating up to the top.

Certain things are not worthy of praise - even though from a worldly standpoint they may seem to be. "We welcome everybody." Sure, but if we are Christians, once we are welcomed, we are expected to grow and transform from who we were by the renewing of our minds. It is a different kind of life.





**It is appropriate to praise the power of God in our lives. Jesus restores a man's sight:**

Luke 18:40-43: (NASB) <sup>40</sup>And Jesus stopped and commanded that he be brought to him; and when he came near, he questioned him, <sup>41</sup>What do you want me to do for you? And he said, Lord, I want to regain my sight! <sup>42</sup>And Jesus said to him, Receive your sight; your faith has made you well. <sup>43</sup>Immediately he regained his sight and began following him, glorifying God; and when all the people saw it, they gave praise to God.



**It is appropriate to praise the spiritual work of those within the brotherhood:**

2 Corinthians 8:16-18: (NASB) <sup>16</sup>But thanks be to God who puts the same earnestness on your behalf in the heart of Titus. <sup>17</sup>For he not only accepted our appeal, but being himself very earnest, he has gone to you of his own accord. <sup>18</sup>We have sent along with him the brother whose fame in the things of the gospel has spread through all the churches;



Paul is focusing on two individuals here. He talks about **Titus** being very earnest, going to the Corinthians *of his own accord*. He praises the Christ-likeness that brought Titus to them.

Then he mentions a **nameless brother**. The Corinthians seem to know who he is. We do not know, though speculation says it could have been Silas, Luke or several other brethren. But Paul tells us this man's *fame in the things of the gospel has spread through all the churches*. Paul was not afraid to draw attention to those who brought glory to God's name. We do not want to be afraid of that either. Sometimes we hold back our praise just in case it might make them proud. But it also might encourage a whole lot of people. We must remember that we are to build people up and to recognize that which brings honor to God is praiseworthy. *Dwell on those things.*



**It is appropriate to look at the spiritual growth and maturity in our brethren as praiseworthy:**

Philippians 1:9-11: (KJV) <sup>9</sup>And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; <sup>10</sup>That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ; <sup>11</sup>Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.

Being filled with the *fruits of righteousness*. He is complimenting his brethren in Philippi saying: "This is how I like to see you. This is what I think of when I think of you." What does this do? This brings glory and praise to God.

We need to focus ourselves on that higher level. *Dwell on these things*, not the other examples we started with.

### THINKING ABOUT THINKING:



A MATURE CHRISTIAN'S THINKING MUST DWELL ON THE HIGHEST LEVELS OF PRAISEWORTHY AND GOD HONORING THINGS IT CAN FIND.

We need to always remember the difference between things that we acknowledge and things that we dwell upon. If God would praise something, then we can dwell upon it! LET US THINK BEFORE WE ACT!



This is such a great example. If God praises something, we know it is good thing to dwell on. We are talking about the development of our minds. We are talking about the transformation - the renovation - of our minds from old thinking to new thinking.



We leave the old behind when we renovate a room or a building. My wife and I bought a very old house many, many years ago. And Jonathan, you remember this house was a broken down, absolute mess. There was a ton of renovations we needed to do. In some cases, what was put in was unrecognizable. We had to remove anything that was off so we could replace it with something that was true and sound in terms of construction.

It is the same with our spiritual lives. We are focusing on the solid basis of transformed thinking, what we need to dwell on.

#### Our theme text, one last time:

**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.*

To *dwell* is to accept, and make our thinking sound and practicable because it is logical and not emotional.

The formula for spiritually-mature thinking is simple. It is not necessarily easy to do, but it is actually simple.



As we said previously, by worldly standards we acknowledge what is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, and of good report. **But by godly standards, we dwell on that which is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, and of good report.**



We acknowledge the things in the world that are worthy of acknowledgement, of some attention. Please do not misunderstand - we are not saying to ignore all the good things around us, especially when we see goodness.

Be on top of that, but do not let that guide you. What should guide us are these higher things. But we must acknowledge what is excellent in the world. That is an important part versus dwelling on what is excellent by godly standards. We need to acknowledge what is praiseworthy in the world. There are lots of things that are praiseworthy, so acknowledge them, applaud them, but  *dwell*  on what is praiseworthy by God's standards. All of this was exemplified by Jesus as the  *author and finisher of our faith*  (Hebrews 12:2).

It is fitting that Paul in his letter to the Philippian Christians gave us the following insight into the heart, mind and actions of Jesus:

Philippians 2:5-11: (NASB) <sup>5</sup>*Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus.*



This attitude is the desire to only do the Father's will. Jesus said, *I came not to do mine own will, but the will of Him that sent me*, (John 6:38) so we are to have this transformed attitude of the  *new creature* .



<sup>6</sup>*who, although he existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped,*



As a spirit being, Jesus in his pre-human existence as the Logos was in a glorious position. Other translations say:  *he counted not the being on an equality with God a thing to be grasped, or he did not meditate a usurpation.*  In contrast, Lucifer was also a spirit being, but he wanted to selfishly exalt himself by saying,  *I will be like the Most High*  (Isaiah 14:14).

<sup>7</sup>*but emptied himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men.*



This was the ultimate honorable action, making him worthy of our veneration.

<sup>8</sup>*Being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*



He satisfied justice. (1 Corinthians 15:22)  *As in Adam all die, so in Christ will all be made alive.*  A perfect man sinned, and only a perfect man could pay the price as a ransom.

<sup>9</sup>*For this reason also, God highly exalted him, and bestowed on him the name which is above every name,*



Because Jesus was so loyal to God, he was entrusted with great honor and power.

<sup>10</sup>*so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, <sup>11</sup>and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*



We cannot wait for that day! The death and resurrection of Jesus that enables the future kingdom of God to come to its full establishment is certainly something praiseworthy to  *dwell*  upon.

When we look at the example of Jesus just in these few verses in Philippians, and then we look at Philippians 4:8,  *Whatsoever things are true*  and so forth, we see that both of these things are exactly congruent with each other. They exactly fit because Jesus is the example of what to dwell on.

### THINKING ABOUT THINKING:



A CHRISTIAN'S THINKING DOES NOT GROW AND MATURE INTO A SPIRITUALLY DRIVEN MINDSET BY ACCIDENT OR BY OSMOSIS.

This will only happen by allowing God's spirit to guide us as we give attentive and intentional focus to the right things. Learning to differentiate between that which we acknowledge and that which we dwell upon is the beginning. Actually dwelling on the right things is the result. LET US THINK BEFORE WE ACT!

It is important to understand that our thinking produces our character. Our thinking produces our level of faithfulness to God through Christ.

- ◇ What are we going to do?
- ◇ How are we going to focus on it?
- ◇ What will I dwell upon?

Those are the questions, and [Philippians 4:8](#) gives us the answers. What do we do with those answers?



*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.



Join us next week for our podcast on May 29, 2023

Ep. 1283: Is following Christ the Same as Following Christianity? (Part I)

**Study Questions to follow**

# Study QUESTIONS

## Ep. 1282: We Are What We Think We Think About, So What Are We Thinking About? (Part II)

See:  CQRewind  
SHOW NOTES

<https://christianquestions.com/program/philippians-4-ii/>

1. As Christians, on what level should we be processing and thinking about our experiences? How is this different from our human method of looking at things?
2. What is the difference between “dwelling” on a thought and thinking about it casually? By what process can we make our thinking intentional? (See Philippians 4:8)
3. What direction does Paul give in Romans 12:1 to repentant sinners who have accepted Christ as their Savior? What action is required for a “new creature in Christ”? What is the deeper meaning of “transformation” in this application, and how do we accomplish it? (See 2 Corinthians 5:17, Romans 12:2, 2 Corinthians 3:18, Mark 9:2)
4. Who is responsible for controlling the influences of God’s spirit in our lives? What are some of the “dwelling places” that a mature Christian’s thoughts should occupy? (See Philippians 4:8, John 17:17, Matthew 7:12, Ephesians 5:3-4)
5. How does Jesus’ response to the rich young ruler in Mark 10:20-21 illustrate how Jesus saw beauty in the fallen human race? How does dwelling on the beauties and wonder of nature bring us closer to God? How does dwelling on the innocence of children do so? (See Psalms 8:1,3-4, 14:1, Mark 10:13-14,16)
6. Through what lens should we look at our fellow Christian brethren? Why is dwelling on all these things so necessary for our Christian development?
7. What is the difference between acknowledging and dwelling on things of good report? How do we separate out things of good report in the world versus those of godly standards, and what should be our reaction to each?
8. How can recognizing the good behavior we see in the world prepare us for the role of blessing humanity in the kingdom? What were the messages Peter and Paul conveyed to the early church that can help us be of good report in our behavior? (See Acts 15:7-11, Philippians 1:27)
9. What is the highest standard of excellence we can develop? How did Jesus demonstrate this excellence? (See 2 Peter 1:3,5-7, 1 Peter 2:9,11-12, 1 Peter 2:4-5)
10. How can we distinguish between things that are truly praiseworthy and things that are not? What things are appropriate to praise? (See Luke 18:40-43, 2 Corinthians 8:16-18) How did Jesus exemplify all what is praiseworthy by God’s standards?
11. What is the ultimate purpose of focusing our minds to dwell on the concepts listed in Philippians 4:8? How will you better exemplify the qualities in Philippians in your own life? (See John 6:38, Philippians 2:5-11)