

THINKING THINGS

Philippians 4:8, "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report: if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."

Here is a message that is for all ages, but naturally it is for the young and the young in heart. Because the sooner you have this type of a mental attitude and establish it in your life, then "as a man thinketh in his mind so is he," and you will have the mind of Christ in your mind.

Young people are in the plastic stage of their lives and with the whole world before them and a mightier world within you to mold you as you will and you can almost be anything you like. I don't mean in regard to the externals, or intellectual capacities, for they are only partially in your control. But in regard to the more important and real things in life, the elevation of soul and mind.

Young people are in a period of life of which fair dreams of the future are natural. It is as the prophet says, "For the young man to see visions," and to ennoble his life thereafter by turning them into realities.

Generous and noble ideas ought to belong to the young. But young people are also in the period when there is a keen joy in mere living and when some desires, which get weaker as you get older, and are very strong and mar youthful freshness and purity.

So taking all this into account. I thought it would be of value to press home some principles from this magnificent text. And there are many messages in this verse. But we will simplify this text by asking three questions.

What, why, how????

First, what is the counsel here?

"Think on these things."

To begin with that advice implies that we can and therefore that we should, exercise a

very rigid control over that part of our lives which a great many of us never think of controlling at all, the mentality of the soul. The governor of the soul, the instructor of the soul, the guide of the soul, the right man of the soul.

There are host of people whose thoughts are just hooked on to one another by the slightest links of accidental connection. And who scarcely ever have a strong hand upon them, or coerced them into order, or decided what they are going to let come into their minds, and what to keep out.

Circumstances, the necessities of our daily occupations, the duties that we owe to one another, all these make certain streams of thought very necessary. And to some of us very absorbing, and for the rest well. "He that hath no rule over his own spirit, is like a city broken down without walls." Anybody can go in and anything can go in and come out.

I am sure among young men and young women there are multitudes who have never realized how responsible they are for the flow of the waves of that great river that is always coming from the depths of their own being, and have never asked whether this current is bringing down sand or gold.

Exercise control as becomes you over the run and the drift of your thoughts. Many of us have minds like cities broken down. Put a guard on the gate, as they do in continental countries, and let in no vagrant that cannot show his passport and a clean bill of health. That is a lesson that some of us need very much today.

But notice further, the company of the fair guest that you may welcome into the hospitalities of your mind and your soul. "Think on these things."

In verse 8 "think on these things" does not appear. It ends with the phrase, "and if any praise." But verse 9 begins with, "These things consider, which ye have both learned

and received. LOGIZOMAI in the Greek means think.

So it says “consider, or think, on these things.” What things? It would take forever to exhaust the great cataloge which the apostle gives here, but let us mention some of the principles found here.

“Whatsoever things are true, think on these things.” Let your minds be exercised, breathed, braced, lifted, filled by bringing them into contact with Truth, especially with the highest of all truths, the Truths affecting God and your relations to Him.

Why should you, as so many of us, be living amidst the small things of life, the trifles that are here, and never coming into vital contact with the greatest things of all, the Truths about God and Christ, and what you have to do with Them and what They have to do with you.

“Whatsoever things are true, consider, think on these things.” The Word, the Lord, the Divine Viewpoint of life, your life.

“Whatsoever things are honest.” The word “honest” is SEMNOS, august, venerable, honorable, reverent, serious, nobly serious, grave, solemn. These thoughts should be familiar to your mind, not frivolities, not mean things.

There is an old story in Roman history about the barbarians breaking into the capitol, and their fury being awed into silence and struck into immobility, as they saw, round and round the hall, the august senators each in his seat.

Let your minds be like this, with reverent thoughts clustering on every side. And when wild passions, and animal desires, and low, mean contemplations dare to cross the threshold, they will be awed into silence and stillness, because your mind is occupied with “Whatsoever things are august. Think on these things.”

“Whatsoever things are just.” DIKAIA in the Greek. Let the great, solemn thought of duty, obligation, what I ought to be and do, be very familiar to your consideration and

meditation. “Whatsoever things are just, fair, think on these things.”

“Whatsoever things are pure.” AGNA in the Greek. Let white-robed angels haunt the place. Let there be in you a shuddering recoil from all the opposite, and entertain angels not unawares (HAGNOS), pure from defilement, not contaminated. This is from the same root as holy. “Whatsoever things are holy, saintly, separated, sanctified, think on these things.”

Now these characteristics of thoughts which I have touched upon all belong to a lofty region, but the apostle is not contented with speaking austere things. He goes now into a region tinged with emotion and says, “Whatsoever things are lovely.” (PROS PHILEO), loveable, pleasing, agreeable.

PROS means face to face, PHILEO means love, rapport. PHILOTHEOS is a lover of God, from 2 Timothy 3:4. PHILOXENOS is loving strangers, or hospitality, Titus 1:8. PHILOGATHOS, is loving that which is good. (Here good is AGATHOS), Titus 1:8. PHILARGUROS, which is loving money. ARGUROS is silver is in 2 Timothy 3:2. PHILAUTOS, is loving oneself. 2 Timothy 3:2. PHILEDONOS is loving pleasure, 2 Timothy 3:4.

Whatsoever things are loveable, face to face rapport, PHILOS, goodness, is beautiful, and in effect the ONLY beautiful. Whatsoever things are loveable think on these things.

“Whatsoever things are of a good report,” literally, whatsoever things are well spoken of, and speak good in the naming of them. Let thoughts of them be in your mind (EUPHEMOS). Uttering words or sounds of good omen, avoiding ill-omened words. Hence this is fair sounding, good report. EU is good. PHEME saying, good reputation.

Then he gathers them up into two words. “If there be any virtue” ARETE, properly denotes, whatever procures preeminent estimation for a person or a thing, intrinsic eminence, renown excellence. That covers the ground of the first four that he has already spoken about: truth, venerable, just, pure.

"And if there be any praise." EPAINOS is approbation, commendation, and this resumes and sums up the last two. "Whatsoever things are loveable and of a good report, think on these things."

Now, there is pointed out here how the apostle accepts the non-Christian notion of the people in whose tongue he was speaking. And here, for the only time in his letters, uses the pagan word "virtue," which was a spell among the Greeks and says, "I accept the world's notion of that is virtuous and praiseworthy. And I bid you to take it to your hearts."

Christianity covers all the ground that the noblest morality has ever attempted to mark out and possess, and it covers a great deal more. "If there be any virtue." As you Greeks are fond of talking about, and if there be any praise, if there is anything in men which commends

noble actions, think on these things. Here is virtue. Here is praise-worthiness.

Now you will not obey this commandment unless you obey also the negative side of it, that is to say, you will not think on these fair forms, and bring them into your minds and souls, unless you turn away, by resolute effort, from their opposites.

There are some, even possibly some we know, that are representatives of the class, who seem to turn this apostolic precept right round about. And whatsoever things are illusory and vain, whatsoever things are mean and frivolous and contemptible, whatsoever things are unjust,

not fair, and whatsoever things are impure, and whatsoever things are ugly, and whatsoever things are branded with a stigma by all men, they think on these things.

Like the flies that are attracted to a piece of putrid meat, there are young men who are drawn by the lustful, the lewd, the impure thoughts. And there are young women who are too idle and uncultivated to have any pleasure in anything higher than gossip and trivial fiction.

Whatsoever things are noble and lovely, think on these things. And get rid of all the others. "The filling of the Holy Spirit is love."

There are plenty of occasions round about you to force the opposite upon your notice. And unless you shut your door fast, and double bolt it, they will be sure to come in.

Popular literature, the trivialities that are put into some periodicals, what they call "realistic fashion," "modern art," which has come to be largely the servant of sense, the stage, which has come, and more is the pity, for there are enormous possibilities of good in it too, be largely a minister of corruption, of its not of corruption, at least frivolity. All these things are appealing to most.

And some young people, away from the restraints of home and in a city, where you think nobody can see you sowing your wild oats, have gotten entangled with them.

Cast out all this filth, and all meanness and pettiness from your habitual thinking, and let august and the lovely and the pure and the true come in instead.

You have a cup in your hand, and you can either press into it clusters of ripe grapes and make mellow wine, or you can squeeze into it wormwood and gall and hemlock and poison berries. And as you brew, you have to drink it.

You have the canvas and you are to cover it with the figures that you like best. You can either do it as fra Angelico did who painted the white walls of every cell in his quiet convent with madonnas and angels and risen Christs. Or you can do like some of those low-toned Dutch painters, who never get above a brass pan and a carrot, and ugly boors and women, and fill the canvas with vulgarities and deformities. Choose which you will have to keep you company.

Now think for a moment on why this counsel is pressed on us. The reasons very briefly are they are first, because thought molds actions. "As a man thinketh in his heart so is he." One looks around the world, and all these solid seeming realities of institutions, buildings, governments, inventions and ma-

chines, atomic submarines, electronic telegrams, laws and governments, palaces and fortresses. They are all but embodied thoughts.

There was a thought at the back of each of them which took shape. So in another sense than the one in which he saying was originally meant, but yet an august and solemn sense.

"The Word is made flesh." And our thoughts become visible. God's thoughts became visible and our thoughts becoming visible stand around us, a ghastly company.

Sooner or later what has been the drift and trend of a man's life comes out, flashes out sometimes, and dribbles out at other times, into visibility in his actions. And just as the thunder follows on the swift passage of lightning, so my acts are neither more or less than the reverberation and after clap of my thoughts.

So if you are entertaining in your minds and souls this august company of which our text speaks, your lives will be fair and beautiful. For what does the Apostle immediately go on to add to our text?

"These things do." literally, practice. From PRASSO POIEO, which is action complete in itself, the word "do." But PRASSO means to practice, and you certainly will if you think about them, and as you certainly will not unless you do.

Again thought and work make character. We come into a world that has certain dispositions and bias. But that is not character. It is only the raw material of character. It is all plastic, like the lava when it comes out of the volcano. But it hardens, and whatever else my thought may do, and whatever effects may follow upon any of my actions, the recoil of them on myself is the most important effect to me.

There is not a thought that comes into, and is entertained in a man, or rolled as a sweet morsel under his tongue, but contributes its own little but appreciable something to the making of a man's character. I wonder if they are not some people now who have

been so long accustomed to entertain these angels of whom our text speaks as that to entertain their opposites would be an impossibility. I hope there is.

I wonder if there is anybody who has been so long accustomed to live amidst the thoughts that are small and trivial and frivolous, if not amongst those that are impure and abominable, as that to entertain their opposite seems almost an impossibility. I am afraid there are some.

I remember reading about a Maori woman who had come to live in one of the cities in New Zealand, in a respectable station, and after a year or two of it she left her husband and children, and civilization, and hurried back to her tribe. Flung off the European garb and donned the blanket, and was happy crouching over the embers on the clay hearth.

Some people have become so accustomed to the low, the wicked, the lustful, the impure, and the frivolous, the contemptible, that they cannot, or at any rate, have lost all disposition to rise to the lofty, the pure, and the true.

Once more as thought makes deed, and thought and deeds make character, so character makes destiny, here and hereafter. If you have these blessed thoughts in your minds and souls, as your continual compassions and you habitual guests, then, you will have a light within that will burn all independent of externals. And whether the world smiles or frowns on you, you will have the true wealth in yourselves.

"A better and enduring substance."

You will have peace. You will be lords of the world and having nothing and yet you have all. No harm can come to a man who has laid up in his youth, as the best treasure of old age. This possession of these thoughts enjoined in our text, and character, makes destiny hereafter. What is a man whose whole life has been one long thought about money making, or about other objects of earthly ambition, or about the lusts of the flesh, and the lusts of the eyes and pride the pattern of life, to do in Heaven? What would one of those fishes in the sunless caverns of

America, which by long living in the dark, have lost their eyes, do if they were brought out into the sunshine?

A man will go to his own place, the place for which he is fitted, the place for which he has fitted himself by his daily life. And especially by the trend and the direction of his thoughts. Judas went to his own place.

So don't be led away by talk about seeing both sides, about seeing life first, and knowing what is going on. It is better to be simple concerning evil and wise concerning good. Don't be led away by talk about having your fling and sowing your wild oats. You may make an indelible stain on your conscience, which even forgiveness will not wipe out. And you may sow your wild oats, but what will the harvest be? "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." Would you like all your low thoughts, all your foul thoughts, to return and sit down beside you, and say, "We have come to keep you company forever?"

"If there be any virtue, think on these things."

Thirdly, lastly, now how is this precept best obeyed?

I have been speaking to some extent about that and saying that there must be a real, honest, continuous, effort to keep out the opposite, as well as to bring in the, "things that are loveable, and of good report." But there is one more word that I have to say in answer to the question how this precept can be observed. It is just this: All these things, true, venerable, just, pure, lovely and of good report, are not things only. They are embodied in a Person, for whatsoever things are fair are found in Jesus Christ, and He, in His living self, is the sum of all virtue and of all praise. So that if we link ourselves to Him by faith and love, and take Him into our souls and minds and abide in Him, we have them all gathered together into that one.

Thinking on these things is not merely a meditation upon abstractions, but it is clutching and living in and with and by the living,

loving Lord and Saviour of us all. If Christ is in my thoughts, all good things are there.

If you will trust Him and make Him your companion, He will help you. He will give you His own life. And in it will give you tastes and desires which will make all these fair thoughts congenial to you, and will deliver you from the else hopeless bondage of subjection to their very opposites.

Our souls cleave to the dust. And all our efforts will be foiled, partially or entirely. To obey this precept, unless we remember that it was spoken to people who had previously obeyed a previous commandment, and had taken Christ for their Saviour.

We gravitate earthward after all our efforts. But if we will put ourselves in His hands, then He will be as a magnet drawing us upwards. Or rather He will give us wings of love and contemplation by which we can soar above the dim spot that men call Earth and walk in the heavenly places.

The way by which the commandment is to be obeyed is by obeying the other precept of the same apostle. "Set your minds on things which are above where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God."

Take Christ therefore and enthrone Him in the very sanctuary of your minds. Then you will have all these venerable, pure, blessed thoughts as the very atmosphere in which you move.

"Think on these things," and these things practice. And the God of peace shall be with you.

True, venerable, just, fair, holy, loveable, well-spoken of, virtue, praise. Here are eight characteristics of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is true, venerable, just, holy, loveable, well-spoken of, virtuous and praiseworthy, incarnate in your mind.

"Whatsoever things are honest."

Buddy Dano, Pastor

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