

Think on These Things!

Here is a verse to live by. It gives us a lot of food for thought! Paul writes in Phil. 4:8 & 9, "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, & if there be any praise, **think on these things**. Those things, which ye have both learned, & received, & heard, & seen in me, do: & the God of peace shall be with you."

In verse 8 we discover one of the finest most complete lists of things to **think about** that the world has ever known. This is truly one of the most important verses in the Bible. **For your life today is a result of your thinking yesterday! Your life tomorrow will be determined by what you are thinking today!** You can become the person you want to be simply by changing your thought life. **You can literally change your life by beginning to think different thoughts.**

In our human existence, one of the blessings we have is in the power of choice! You & I have the power to choose the thoughts upon which we will think! That is why Paul says, "think **on**." That preposition "**on**" indicates more than just casual thought! It is determined thought! "Think **on**."

It is no accident that some people are beaten down, defeated, & anxiety-ridden, while other people are productive, effective, & useful. It is no accident that some people take problems & trials in stride, & rise above them, while other people are disoriented by the least irregularity. It all has to do with **the way they think**, or the pattern of their thought life.

It is of interest to observe the way people react to the tragedies & the disappointments of life. **The same identical experience can happen to two people.** The one develops a deeper life of commitment, while the other becomes embittered. The one develops greater love & understanding, while the other experiences the paralysis of resentment. The one responds with courage; the other with self-pity. The one thinks positive; the other becomes negative. We don't, by nature, need any help in the **negative attitudes** of self-pity, resentment & bitterness. We do need guidance in developing a **positive attitude** of courage, love & deeper commitment. What you & I choose to let occupy our minds reveals our characters! We can, & we do, choose what we think about!

Take this man Paul for an example. One day he & his companion Silas were whipped & cast into prison. Their feet were fastened in the stocks. They could neither sit, nor lie down, nor stand. Oh, the **torture!** Amazingly, these unusual men did **not allow** resentment, or discouragement, or even terrible pain, to dominate their minds. They **chose** rather to think of all that God had done for them, & they held a praise meeting then & there.

It had happened in Philippi, & the Philippian Christians never forgot what happened next. The Lord sent an earthquake, loosed the prisoners, & converted the jailer, all because some good men chose to look **up to God**, rather than **down in despair!**

Now, years later Paul was in prison again, at Rome this time! Somehow, this time, God had **not** wrought a miracle to bring about his release. One day the church at Philippi had a letter from Paul, their spiritual father. Reading eagerly, they looked for an account of the hardships which Paul was suffering. **Nothing of the sort was even mentioned!** The entire letter breathes an atmosphere of serenity, joy, & sweetness. This man of God had chosen just to forget the cruelties, the privations, the loneliness, the injustice of his confinement, **& to think about something more inspiring.** To himself, as well as to the Christians in Philippi, & even to you & me this very morning, Paul is saying: "... if there be any virtue, & if there be any praise, **think on these things!**" (Phil. 4:8).

My friends, **if you want to get the most out of life, then you must have something worthwhile to think about!** If you want happiness in your life, remember that happiness is never achieved by dwelling on anger, resentment, & unhappy memories, or thoughts that produce unhappiness. C.W. Longnecker wrote these words: --
If you think you are beaten -- you are; If you think you dare not -- you don't.
If you'd like to win -- but think you can't, It's almost a cinch that you won't.
If you think you'll lose -- you're lost, For out in the world we find
Success begins with a fellow's will -- It's all in the state of the mind.
Life's battles don't always go To the stronger or faster man;
But sooner or later the man who wins Is the man who thinks he can.
(Found in *Lord of the Valley*, by James R. Spruce)

The Apostle Paul is telling us in our Scriptural text that the best way to keep evil ideas out of our minds is to **concentrate on things that are good & pure & beautiful.** So my friends, **let high & noble thoughts fill your mind!** Make a practice of meditating on various aspects of **truth & beauty.** Paul gives us a specific list of things to "**think on**." The preposition "**on**" is very crucial; it means to deliberately **set** our mind, or **fix our thoughts on** these moral & spiritual values. It is far more than just a casual thought; it is a determined thought! The recurring use of the word "**whatsoever**" is like the ringing of a bell. It says to each one of us that **all around you** are things that are true, that are honorable, that are lovely, that are beautiful, that are excellent. **Take the time to search them out!** But everything in our text has **its climax** in one word, the word **think!** Allow me today to challenge you in at least three areas of your thinking: --

1. First, Think About the Good Things in Yourself!

You are a very special person! God has created you, & God doesn't make any junk! God has given you special strengths & spiritual gifts that are **uniquely** yours! God invites you to claim your God given strengths!

Some people believe that **humility** means feeling **bad** about themselves. They begin to think in terms of, "I'm so wretched, useless & worthless." But, my friends, **do not put yourself down!** Do not dwell upon negative aspects in yourself! You can think your way into unhappiness & failure with gloomy thoughts, **or** you can think your way into happiness & success!

If you begin to let your mind dwell upon those **special qualities** within you (& don't tell me you don't have any! -- for you indeed do!), then you will begin to feel **good** about yourself! Not prideful; just a wholesome good. So begin to claim God's gifts of strength He has placed within you. When we deny our strengths, we deny God's gifts, & we deny God. We are so often guilty of selling ourselves short; but remember, the Bible says that **God made us in His own image!**

I had a young girl in my church, probably 3 or 4 years of age, who was so beautiful. We had a little thing going where I'd walk up to her & say, "You are special!" And for whatever reason, maybe just to be argumentative, she would answer back saying, "NO I'm not!" I'd repeat, "Oh, but you are so special." And she would say, "No, I'm not." We would go on & on like that. Every time I'd see her, it was the same conversation, my trying to convince her she was "Special" & her replying, "No, I'm not."

Some times I can almost hear God saying to some of you, "You are so special," & you are answering back telling Him you are **not!** God is trying to convince you of just how very special you are in His sight, but you refuse to accept His affirmation. He does love you! He made you special! Receive & accept His love & grace, & begin to see the **good** He has placed in your life today!

It is said that **depression** comes from looking at the broken fence. **Victory** over depression comes from choosing to look beyond the fence & seeing the roses on the other side. My friends, choose to see the good things God has placed in your life, the beauty of nature, the strength of friendship, & discover that our lives are also loaded with many blessings!

2. Secondly, Think About the Good in Others!

Now you don't have to believe this if you don't chose too, but as for me, well, what can I say, "I'm almost perfect." But everybody else I know has faults of one kind or another. It is so easy, so human, for me to zero in on somebody else's negative aspects.

Can you identify with what I am saying? I hope you understand I am talking here with "tongue in cheek." I'm not perfect, & you know it, & oh, do I ever know it. If I don't know it, my wife is quick to remind me. But the fact is, **all of us** seem to focus on other people's **faults**.

My friends, learn by the grace of God to look for & think upon the virtue & the goodness in other people rather than spending your time dwelling upon their faults. If there be **any** virtue, & if there be **any thing** praise worthy, **think on these things**. After all, **there is something good in everyone!** You may have to look for it, but it's there, for your discovery.

Take the **devil** for example; what can anyone say good about the devil? Well, would you agree with me that the devil is sure a hard worker?? If we can find something good to say about the devil, then surely we can find something good in others who are our brothers/sisters in Christ!

Someone asked a dear saint, who never found fault: "What good is that old town drunk who lives down the street from you?" She thought for a moment & replied: "He walked by here the other day, & you know, he is a **good whistler**."

A preacher was conducting a funeral for man known by everyone to be a real scoundrel, a villain, a rascal, a reprobate. The preacher was struggling trying to find something decent to say about this wretch of a man; I mean, after all, it was his funeral. Finally in his frustration he asked the question: "Does anyone here know something good to say about the deceased?" He asked that a couple times while trying to think of what he could say: "Does anyone know something good to say about the deceased?" Finally someone volunteered, "**His brother was worse!**"

My friends, look for & think on, the **good** in other people. **Don't constantly be putting other people down**. Their personality may rub you the wrong way, but they are still a child of God. Look for & think on, the good, the praise worthy, in them. Don't get caught in the trap of being critical of others; of being judgmental; of always finding fault. Don't listen to gossip! And when someone comes to you with a critical spirit, tell them you don't want to hear it. Think & talk only about the **Good** in others!

3. Finally, Think About the Good that Comes From God!

God is so good, so kind, so merciful to **all of us!** Why not begin each day with thoughts of God's goodness toward you. Memorize the promises contained in His Holy Word & let your mind dwell upon those promises throughout the day!

The **first good thing** we each receive from God is His forgiveness through Jesus Christ. 1 John 1:9 still says: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful & just to forgive us our sins, & to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." The Psalmist tells us, "The Lord is merciful & gracious; He is slow to get angry & full of unfailing love. He will not constantly accuse us, nor remain angry forever. He has not punished us for all our sins, nor does He deal with us as we deserve. For His unfailing love toward those who fear Him is as great as the height of the heavens above the earth. He has removed our rebellious acts as far away from us as the east is from the west. The Lord is like a father to His children, tender & compassionate to those who fear Him. For He understands how weak we are; -- He knows we are only dust" (103:8-14 NLT).

That, my friends, is good news! The Lord thought of you when you were lost in your sins & away from God, & He sent His only Son as a Savior to die for you! **Think** of it! **The sinless Son of God died for sinners!** When we have been forgiven of our sins, we enter into a whole new way of life! In the new birth, we become a child of God! We walk in light rather than in darkness. We become recipients of God's grace, His strength, His love! We are told in the Bible that "whatever is good & perfect comes to us from God above" (James 1:17 NLT).

We need to sing that chorus over & over --

"God is so good; -- God is so good, God is so good -- He's so good to me.

"He cares for me -- He cares for me, He cares for me -- He's so good to me."

Conclusion: -- My friends, God cares about your **thought life!** Our actions need watching, but so do our thoughts! When we surrender our lives to Jesus Christ, we ought to go from a **worldly mind** to a **Christ-like mind**. If Jesus Christ is really the Lord of our lives, we must allow Him to have control of our thought life. Jesus wants to take captive our every thought.

Philippians 4:8 can serve as a spiritual discipline for our minds. This is positive thinking at its best, & it is the surest safeguard against the power of the enemy! **Notice** that Paul says in verse 9, that **if we will do these things**, "the God of peace will be with you." So let high & noble thoughts about **yourself**, about **others**, about **God Himself**, fill your mind, & you will experience the **peace of God!**

Let's sing about that *Wonderful Peace* -- in closing today: --

*Peace! Peace! wonderful peace, Coming down from the Father above;
Sweep over my spirit forever, I pray, In fathomless billows of love.*

Notice that last verse -- & let it be an invitation to you today --

*O Soul, are you here without comfort or rest, Walking down the rough pathway of time?
Make Jesus your friend ere the shadows grow dark; O accept this sweet peace so sublime.*

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