

Message #23

Philippians 4:8-9

In the mid 1400's an Italian was born who had a deep interest in the Bible and a quest for learning and exploring. In fact, just recently he has been in the news. He became quite a navigator. He talked to other sailors and studied books and maps and he came to the conclusion that the world was not flat, but round. He decided it was possible to sail a ship from Spain west across the Atlantic to new undiscovered lands without dropping off into oblivion. His name was Christopher Columbus. Eventually this Italian would discover America and it all started with an idea.

Back in 1919, Robert Goddard, an engineer and physicist, came up with a strange idea. He thought it would be possible to put one rocket on top of another rocket, piggy back to each other to act as a booster so that when the first rocket got the other one off the ground and into space, it would drop off and enable the second rocket to travel at even a greater speed toward its destination. That idea became reality in 1969 because NASA space engineers took Goddard's idea and put a man on the moon.

There is no doubt that the way a person thinks and what a person thinks about becomes a critical key to what a person does. This fact is not only true when it comes to discovery, but this is most definitely true when it comes to spirituality. **Think about this, any sin any person commits begins in the mind.** Whether it is the sin of jealousy, worry, rebellion, adultery, robbery, covetousness or greed; it begins in the mind.

The Apostle Paul believed that proper thinking would lead to proper action. He believed if you think right, you will act right. **He also believed that proper thinking was a key to having joy in life and having the peace of God in life.**

We know that in this Age of Grace, God is with every believer. In fact, we know God is in every believer forever (John 14:16-17). However, God's peace is not in every believer and not every believer has joy in life. A big reason why believers miss out on this is because of the way they think.

Now the Philippian church was a good church. But in that church there were some people who were constantly worrying, complaining, bickering and whining. These were believers who were lacking joy and lacking God's peace. So when Paul writes these two verses, what he says is this:

BELIEVERS WHO WILL EXPERIENCE THE JOY OF GOD AND THE PEACE OF GOD WILL THINK RIGHT AND THEY WILL ACT RIGHT.

This is a very simple thesis, but it is not one that is easy to appropriate. Having joy and peace from God requires proper thinking and proper actions. Paul begins **verse 8** by again repeating the adverb "finally." Paul says let's wrap this up. You want joy and peace, I will lay out how to get it.

Now there are two simple ingredients in the formula for having joy and peace:

INGREDIENT #1 – Having the joy and peace of God requires right thinking. **4:8**

We live in a dirty, filthy, proud, arrogant world and if a believer is going to have joy and peace he must focus his mind in a right way and focus on right things.

At the end of **verse 8** is the verb “dwell” or some translations use the verb “think.” This word has to do with much more than simple thought. The actual word (λογίζομαι) means to very carefully calculate and consider something (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 270). The word is fascinating because it has a judicial ring to it in making judgments. So this is very careful calculation that is to be made not only by individuals, but the church.

The verb is present tense meaning this is to be the way to continually think and it is second person plural meaning this is to be the habitual pattern for people in the church. If a church wants the joy of God and the peace of God, this is the continual mindset that must exist.

There is no doubt that the central key to our hearts is our minds. Proverbs 23:7 says, “for as he thinks within himself, so he is.” Isaiah 26:3 says, “The steadfast of mind Thou will keep in perfect peace.” So a critical factor to having the joy of God and the peace of God is the focus of our minds. This is why Paul desired to bring “every thought into captivity” (II Cor. 10:5).

Now in this one verse there are eight areas of focus on which we should continually keep our minds. If we purpose to continually keep our minds focused on these eight areas, we will have joy and we will have the peace of God.

Now we will notice that before every one of these nouns, it is preceded by the relative pronoun “whatever” (οσα). This pronoun puts this into the realm of anything and everything. This would include things pertaining to God, the Bible, the world, things seen and unseen and life in general. The fact that there is no article “the” before any of the nouns (anarthrous construction) means that this is the way to think about the character and quality of everything. If one does this, if a church does this, it will have joy and it will have the peace of God.

There are eight areas of thought that are to dominate the churches mind and the people’s minds if they want to the joy of God and the peace of God. **There comes a point, no matter what our situation, when we must say it is time to let our minds think about better things!**

Area of Thought #1 - Continually think about whatever is true. **4:8a**

Paul says let your mind focus on truth and reality (αληθη). This is a word that means to think about things that are actual and real and true to facts (*Ibid.*, p. 20). **God wants His people to think factually, not fictionally.** Think about things that are genuine, not imaginative. Think about things that are reality, not unreal. Think about things of actuality, not things that are false. In other words, use your mind to dwell on truthful things.

Some people never have any peace in life because they live mentally in some fictional and delusional and false la la land. They read books and watch movies that take their minds away from what is true and sound to some imaginary thinking that doesn't really exist.

In fact, one counselor said this is one reason marriages fall apart. People imagine things that aren't true. Here is what one psychologist wrote: "Believing what is not true leads to misunderstandings, which lead to miscommunication, which leads to conflict. Many negative emotions, such as anxiety, depression, jealousy, insecurity, and anger, result from telling ourselves things that are not true. Sometimes we work with a couple who ...believe their statements, but they often have little or no evidence to back up what is said. People seldom believe things that simply can't be true; however they frequently believe things that could be true even though they are not. ... Paul... did not engage in self-pity. He gave us his truthful reporting of events..." (Dr. DeLoss Friesen, *Helping Your Clients Tell Themselves The Truth*, pp. 111-113).

This point of not focusing on what is true is not just a problem in marriages, but in the church. A Pastor I know had a person stop coming to church. So he went and called on the person to find out why. The person said because everyone in the church knew of a problem he had had in the past. The truth is, no one knew. The Pastor did not know and neither did anyone in the church. The person just imagined this and stopped going to church.

We live in a world in which the media is becoming famous for that which is not true. No one will ever have peace thinking about lies. This will never lead to joy or peace. Because in any context, letting minds focus on what is true is the key to joy and peace.

Area of Thought #2 - Continually think about whatever is honorable. 4:8b

The word "honorable" (σεμνά) is one that means to think about things that are serious, grave, reverent and august (*Ibid.*, p. 404). Think about things lofty, majestic and awesome. This word specifically has to do with the way one thinks about a variety of things, including God.

God wants His people serious-minded people. He does not want them light or frivolous in the way they think. God does not want our mind thinking on the dirt and filth of this world. People who will experience joy and peace are serious-minded and lofty-minded people. This does not mean they cannot laugh, but what it does mean is that they have an honest, honorable, serious dignity to the way they think.

This is so interesting because the one who is happy and peaceful is one who is serious and not silly. It is a known fact that some of the funniest comedians outwardly are some of the most struggling, hurting people inwardly. They have not developed a mindset that is truly joyful and peaceful.

Area of Thought #3 - Continually think about whatever is right. **4:8c**

The word “right” (δικαία) refers to thinking about things that meet the righteous standards of God (*Ibid.*, pp. 115-116). Paul is saying that if believers want joy and peace they need to focus their minds in ways that think consistently about things in view of God’s Word.

Many believers and churches miss joy and peace because they do not think in ways that are Biblical. In fact, some let their minds think about things that are contrary to God’s inspired Word and it is no wonder that they miss joy and peace. Anything that is right according to the Word of God is worthy of our thoughts.

Area of Thought #4 - Continually think about whatever is pure. **4:8d**

The word “pure” (αζνα) refers to thinking about things that are free from ceremonial defilement. This has to do with thinking about things that are holy, sacred, undefiled and chaste (*Ibid.*, p. 6). This word refers to moral purity and doctrinal purity.

There are some people who spend their time focused on filling their minds and hearts on dirty, filthy things and then they wonder why they don’t have power in their lives and why God does not answer their prayers. There are believers who have dirty minds, not pure minds.

Peaceful minds are pure minds. They do not dwell on sinful, shameful and immoral things. Those who continually think about impure, unholy things never have peace of mind or joy in their heart. God is pure and He will never give His peace to those whose minds are focused on that which is impure.

Area of Thought #5 - Continually think about whatever is lovely. **4:8e**

The word “lovely” (προσφιλη) is very interesting and very rare. It is only found here in the N.T.. It is a word that refers to thinking about that which is pleasing and agreeable and even loving between friends. This would include thinking about things that promote peace, rather than conflict (*Ibid.*, p. 388). This is thinking about things that attract others and even could sway their “admiration and affection.”

God says if you want joy and peace in your lives, let your minds think about that which promote peace and not conflict. Think about things in the world that are admirable and lovely.

Now of course we know there will be conflict. Paul referred to that in this very letter (3:17; 4:3). But the continual mindset of one who will be happy and peaceful will be that of thinking in ways that are pleasing and agreeable with others.

Area of Thought #6 - Continually think about whatever is of good repute. 4:8f

This word (ευφημα) is another very rare Greek word. It specifically has to do with thinking about things that are praise worthy and of good reputation. This word has to do with avoiding words that aren't good (*Ibid.*, p. 190).

People who will be joyful and peaceful will be those who think about the good in others, not the bad or negative. Those who think about things bad and negative are not happy, joyful people and they do not have the peace of God.

There are people who do earn a good reputation by doing good and not bad. Those kinds of people and those kinds of things are the things about which we should think.

Area of Thought #7 - Continually think about whatever is excellent. 4:8g

The "if" clause is first class conditional, meaning it is a reality that there are these things on which one may think. The word "excellent" (αρετη) refers to thinking about excellent, moral virtues that procure a preeminent estimation. This is excellent from God's perspective. In other words, we are to think about that which manifests the power of God in one's life. We are to let our minds think about things that are morally excellent and virtuous and as we do that, we will have joy and the peace of God.

Area of Thought #8 - Continually think about whatever is praise worthy. 4:8h

Again this is a first class conditional "if" clause meaning it is reality that there are praise worthy things on which to focus thinking. These words refer to thinking about things that bring praise and exaltation to God (*Ibid.*, p. 163). Again this is praiseworthy from God's perspective. Men will pat you on the back and praise you even if it contradicts God and His Word.

Paul knew a great battleground for the believer was the battleground of his mind. Satan's first sin was mental, the sin of pride. Scientists say we have 50,000-70,000 thoughts per day. We are inundated every day with false advertising, vain philosophies and godless lures.

The believer who will be happy and peaceful will use his/her mind to think about these things. That person will have the peace of God.

INGREDIENT #2 – Having the joy and peace of God requires right behavior. 4:9

Paul says you continually practice the kinds of things you have seen in me and heard from me. That word "learn" has to do with learning by example and the word "heard" has to do with learning by instruction and teaching.

Paul is not bragging here and he is not prideful here. He is simply saying my mind has been focused right and I have taught you and lived it.

Thinking right is the key to acting right and that is why Paul zeroes in on the mind before the action. But in order for a believer to have joy and peace, he must make application to his life.

One can know truth, see truth, understand truth and not live truth. But in order to have joy and peace, one must live it.

The great sin of Phariseeism is to know truth, speak truth but not do the truth (Matt. 23:3). Phariseeism can fool people, but it cannot bring the peace of God. God is the author and giver of peace both positionally and practically (Heb. 13:20; Rom. 15:33; 16:20; I Cor. 14:33; II Cor. 13:11; I Thess. 5:23).

Paul says practice the truth like I have and you will have the peace of God.