

### Philippians 4:6–9 (NKJV)

**6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; 7 and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.**

**8 Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things. 9 The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.**

This is a continuation on our study of Paul's teaching on how to counter anxious thoughts. This is the final **part three** of a study on this text. I wanted to thank you all for coming together Thursday evening and discussing how you apply these texts and texts like them. I hope it was beneficial for everyone involved.

Now remember how we spoke about the list of virtues best apply to Christ?

Then, when we meditate we work ourselves from there.

That is where we left off.

#### **whatever things are just,**

We know that Christ is **just**. But look how **He** applied it. Look at the love with which he applied it. Christ hated our sin with a **just** hatred. And yet Christ, because He was just, met the **just demand** for our sin with **His life**.

Has your spouse ever done something to you and you think, I do not deserve that treatment? I am sure you never have, but I may have one time. It is always good to think back to what is **really just**. Oh maybe we do not deserve that treatment from our spouse or from another person. But do we really want to linger **long** on what we **deserve**? Work your way back to what **is just** and you suddenly aren't being treated so bad. I deserve eternity in hell. I have never stopped deserving that. I, apart from the work of Christ, deserved hell yesterday and this morning. So thinking about what is **just** helps us. It helps me see that I breathe because of grace. And no one needs more grace than I do. So if I see other people from that perspective, I am able to treat them with grace because that is what I need for every breath that I breathe.

Think about it. Aren't some of the sources of anxiety from thoughts based on thinking we deserve better. Thoughts about justice put those in perspective.

And we think,

How is Christ just?

There is also the element of justice that means we should **treat** people **justly**. Colossians tells masters to give their slaves what is just and fair. Paul and his companions behaved justly with the believers at Thessalonica.

**Micah 6:8 says**

**8 He has shown you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do justly, To love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God?**

So this should be part of our consideration of just. How can I reflect that fingerprint of Christ. We need to consider, is my treatment of others properly just? There is a lot to meditate on in this list.

**whatever things are pure,**

How about pure. Purity is absence of pollutants. It is all of one thing and nothing of another.

We know that Christ was sinless. He was pure from the pollutant of sin. His life was focused on one thing, not many things. Think about that a little bit. How did **He** do it? Wow. That is so much different than our lives. Then we look at His life and we learn what purity looks like.

When we think about true purity, how does that reflect upon us? Am I pure? No. Not really.

My anxious thinking is not based on my purity of heart. When I see my **impurity** I am driven to Christ. If I think about things that **are pure** I am driven to Christ.

How about when our anxiety is a result of the **wicked flourishing**. How about when we suffer the results of impurity in our lives, either from **our** lack of purity or **others**? How do we sort that out when our anxiety is based on the

consequences of impurity? How do we think about those things? Well the wicked may be impure. But so am I. Maybe in different ways. But it is still true.

Who is pure? Christ is pure. And every virtue that stems from Him that we receive is pure. Those things are pure. We need to lift our eyes from the things that are impure that are **causing us stress** to those things that **are pure**. Every one of these virtues we are to think about put our gripes into perspective.

We need again to ask

**How is Christ pure?**

**How is what He has done in our lives and the lives of other believers pure?**

**What is pure about what He has promised for our futures?**

**What is pure about what He has given to us in our pasts?**

**How can we reflect more of that attribute of Christ in what we do today?**

**whatever things are lovely,**

This word means pleasing and attractive and amiable before God, and often before people. What are those things? Aren't they all things that come from God's grace in our lives?

Christ is lovely. Everything He did is pleasing and attractive and amiable before God. And even today, even though the world does not understand Christ, they often admire some of his traits. But to us He is **lovely altogether**. He has all the attributes that are most attractive to the Christian changed heart. He is the **ultimate** of that which we **aspire to be**.

Our natural reactions are not lovely. But the fruit of the spirit is lovely. Grace and mercy and kindness are lovely. Loving our enemies is lovely.

Keep in mind these virtues that are listed are all antidotes to our fleshly reactions of **anxiety**. Paul is helping us not live in that negative state. We need to think truly. We need to think accurately. Are we **lovely**? Is how we respond in the **flesh lovely**? Is it lovely when we give in to our **natural responses**? No. None of that is lovely. But what **God does in our lives** is lovely. What **God produces in the lives of others** is lovely. What Christ promises for our future is lovely. And ultimately Christ is lovely. Think in that way.

We can again apply the questions.

**whatever things are of good report,**

These are things that are highly regarded or well thought of. What are the things that cause anxious thoughts? Are they ever things of highest virtue? Does that ever cause anxiety? No. Probably not. We get anxious by thinking about all the underhanded things that people do. We think of the evil conspiracies. We think of the wicked succeeding in their plans.

But Christ consists in **all those things most highly regarded and thought well of**. I think we must assume here that the world may have a skewed view. Christ was certainly not **well thought of** by all worldlings. Nor is He now. But none the less He is highly regarded by His Father **and us**, if we are submitted to Christ's Lordship and have a changed heart.

When we meditate on things of good report, what about all those things that the Lord leads fellow believers do in our church? As I talk to you I often hear a good report. I hear about how you were faithful in a difficult circumstance, about how you reached out to someone in need, about how people gathered round someone hurting. That is a good report. What about all the things Christ has done for us? What about the strong stands fellow believers are making all over?

What about the growth of believers around us? We have to make ourselves think about the virtuous things. We have to single those things out and focus on them. It won't just happen.

**How is Christ of good report?**

**How is what He has done in our lives and the lives of other believers of good report?**

**What is of good report about what He has promised for our futures?**

**What is of good report about what He has given to us in our pasts?**

**How can we reflect more of that attribute of Christ in what we do today?**

### **if there is any virtue**

The next two traits are odd. What is odd about them is that they are traits that Greco Roman philosophers held as some of the highest ideals. They were not thought of as Biblical traits. They were what the Greeks held as the standard to aspire to.

I think it is likely that Paul is appealing to the Gentile **moral attributes** these Gentiles were taught as children. Paul was never one to waste a truth, even when it was one the Gentiles held. And Paul is saying, there is truth to those things. The Gentiles philosophers had stumbled on this truth. In fact, the way this text is laid out, it looks to me like the 4 traits before it were lumped into these next two general categories of those things that were morally perfect (Arete, Virtue) and those things most deserving the praise and admiration of mankind (praiseworthy).

Virtue is Arete. That is moral excellence. A perfect knife or a perfect horse were said to be Arete. It is like the best there is. That which is as good as it can be. Virtue also promotes the general good of mankind. Things that are **as good as can be**, things that are promoting the **best for all** are **not** the thoughts that make us anxious.

How many times is your anxiety based on lack of virtue? Maybe it is something you did that was less than virtuous. Maybe someone did something to others that was not at all good for mankind. Is that the kind of thing that you are thinking about that is causing you to think anxiously **true**? Probably. But we are not thinking high enough. We have not reoriented our thinking to eternity. We need to draw our eyes to Christ who is virtuous. He is morally perfect. He is as Arete as Arete can be. He is absolute Arete. He is the perfection of this Greek ideal. He truly does have the good of His children in mind all the time. Maybe we

face a life's catastrophe. We are tempted to cast doubt on the character of God. Is not the answer to look at Christ who has every believer's good in mind every second of every day?

I very much enjoyed Suzannah's explanation of how she faced her recent trial. She searched to know that God is good. Because that is the foundation the devil always wants to destroy. If the devil can get us to doubt the goodness of God, we are open to every temptation.

Won't the meditation on Christ's moral excellence be a remedy to our anxious thoughts. And then, as that works its way down to our lives, maybe when we are charting our course of action, it should be based on this. How can I think about this situation and react to this situation in a way that results in **the good of the others** in this situation? How can I be **that** person? Instead of thinking only on how their actions **affect me**, we should think about how we can be the person who is **virtuous**. Sometimes there is little or no virtue on how others treat us. So we cannot meditate on that. But it is not hard to think about how Christ reacted in all of his situations. That is virtue. That is worth thinking about. And that is worth emulating.

**How is Christ virtuous?**

**How is what He has done in our lives and the lives of other believers that is virtuous?**

**What is virtuous about what He has promised for our futures?**

**What is virtuous about what He has given to us in our pasts?**

**How can we reflect more of that attribute of Christ in what we do today?**

**and if there is anything praiseworthy**

to the Greeks this was that which was **worth the most admiration of humans**. To us it works out to us having conduct that is keeping with God's **own** righteousness.

Do our anxious thoughts come from someone's lack of doing the right thing toward us? I would venture many things fall into that category. We easily meditate on that unrighteousness done to us, that thing that is not worthy of any praise. Actually rebuke might be more fitting than praise to those who have done us wrong.

When we are tempted to be anxious, we can focus on something outside of ourselves. How can we respond in a way that reflects the righteousness of Christ? How can we be like Jesus in this situation? How can we reflect those things that

scripture says are right? How can we be in this situation and act in a way that is worthy of praise for how we handle it. I think that is the focus.

Naturally every single one of these traits draw our focus to Christ and to the commands of Christ. Everything draws us back to having the mind of Christ. Before studying this, I had thought this was an appeal to meditating on all of these positive things. But after studying it I am wondering if it is not directing us to how to respond when we are tempted to give in to our anxieties. These are not just some “out there” ideals we should reflect on. They are topics that undermine the **source** of our anxiety. They are **anti anxiety** thoughts and actions. What do I do when anxiety comes knocking at the door again?

Think about how to counter it by striking at the root of the thought that is causing anxiety. Respond by rethinking the situation. Lift up your eyes. Quit fixating on the cookie you want.

Who is Christ? Really?

What is the **real truth** about my situation according to the Bible? How can I respond in a way that is **noble** like Christ is noble? How can I evaluate my situation in regard to actual **justice**? How can I respond in a way that anyone who knows the truth will regard my actions as being **good and right**?

How can I respond in a way that my response is **actually right** and leading to the betterment of those around me?

Have you ever noticed that your stress is normally based around a fear of what might happen to you. Maybe something horrible will happen that I cannot handle. Maybe what actually happened to me I think I cannot handle. I do not deserve this horrible thing that someone has done. I am afraid of failure, pain, abandonment, rejection, etc etc. But it is always about **us**.

When we meditate on these traits in our passage, we leave that perspective. We begin thinking about our lives from **God's** perspective. We begin seeing it from **who God really is**. We begin seeing it from who we are in Christ. We begin thinking about how we can incorporate traits like Christ. We begin thinking how we can live **bigger than ourselves**. It would not surprise me at all if the traits that we are to meditate on undermine all the sources of anxiety **at their root**. Maybe all the things we become anxious about have their roots in **perspectives we choose that are not true, noble, just, pure, lovely, of good report, virtuous and praiseworthy**.

Whatever the case, I am sure of this. No anxiety has its source from contemplating the character of God and Gods sovereign actions in our lives. Anxiety comes from our imaginations. It comes from all the what ifs we can

imagine. Paul is telling us how to overcome all of that. We can cut it off at the pass if we want to. But it is up to us.

Ok up till now we were told a list of things.

Then we were given a command to **meditate** on those things. Fixate on them. As opposed to fixating on the things that are fuel for our anxious thoughts.

Now Paul gives us a second list of things. Then he gives the commands that we **DO** them.

Paul continues.

**9 The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.**

**The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do,**

I find it interesting that so much emphasis is placed on experience in the Christian life. Like having some ecstatic experience is the secret of the powerful Christian life. Paul was not very cool in that regard. He says, hey remember when I was there and I talked to you for hours about the Christian life. OK. Remember that stuff. Pull out your notes if you have notes. But **remember that stuff**. Because that is where your victory lies. **Good doctrine** is where your growth will happen. Bring that stuff to mind. Just like I am telling you to meditate on these topics. Meditate on what I said as well.

**Learned. Received. Heard.**

Those are kind of boring words aren't they? Some would say those things are dry. Paul was hard to understand some said. He would talk so long that people fell out of windows. He expected people to listen when the internal temperature of the building was over 90 degrees like in Ephesus. He thought people should pay attention to topics like **Justification** and **Sanctification** and **Atonement**. He appeals to those ideas as being relevant preaching. He sometimes has run on sentences. We don't always know where to put the parenthesis. It is sometimes, well, difficult to understand him. It really takes work to follow him.

And he says, that stuff I took the time and trouble **to tell you**, you take the time and trouble **to remember it** and **do it**.

But they did have one example.

They can also remember what Paul **did**. They **SAW** Paul living out the concepts he was teaching. So while they may not be able to answer "what would **Jesus** do?". They could answer "What did **Paul** do?". And while that would not be perfect, it would at least point them in the right direction.

Can we tell any people who are asking advice, **Do what I do?**

Paul did not seem to hesitate to say that. What changes need made in our lives so we would be comfortable in saying, Do what I do?

**and the God of peace will be with you**

We started in verse 7 with the peace of God. We talked about that foundation of peace with God that produces this peace of God. It is peace as a result of being in right relationship with God and then living in proper fellowship with God. But this quote seems to put the peace of God on steroids. He is no longer talking about having the results of right living and right thinking. Now He is talking about having relationship with the very God who provides the benefit of peace. While having the **peace of God** is extraordinary, having the **God of peace** is the ultimate goal.

Some have made the point that this whole passage is **about cultivating the presence of God**. This is not simply a matter of **doing the right thing**. It is not simply about **overcoming anxious thoughts**. It is about **living in the presence of God**. The more we lift our eyes above our circumstances to **Jesus**, the more we **call upon Him**, the more we **trust in Him**, the more we experience **who He really is** in our lives. While we know that theologically Christ is living in us through the Holy Spirit, it requires effort to maintain a mindset that **fully appreciates** His presence in our lives. And the more we remove those things that grieve the Holy Spirit, the more we experience the closeness of fellowship with Christ that His sacrifice for us accommodated.

We have come to the end of this short passage about anxious thoughts. But for certain we have not come to the end of the temptations we will have for anxious thoughts.

I think every human being is tempted to be anxious, is tempted to worry. For some it is a besetting sin. But for all it is a temptation.

Here we have the remedy prescribed by God for anxious thoughts.

It is clearly communicated.

I don't think we should have too much trouble understanding it.

If we do have trouble understanding it, we can go to Jesus's words in the sermon on the mount. He too approaches the topic with easy to understand words.

I guess it all comes down to how much we believe Paul. How much do we believe the words the Holy Spirit inspired.

We have many counter voices. We are told by some so called experts in our world we are victims of anxious thoughts. We are told there are other remedies that we must take if we want to be good to ourselves. Paul mentions nothing of



the kind. Might there be exceptions? Sure. But we had better do business with what Paul and Jesus say before we accept what man says.

Will we do what Paul commanded this morning?

Will we meditate on the remedies to our anxiety?

Will we meditate on ways that we can **think about** those things that are true, noble, just, pure, lovely, of good report, virtuous and praiseworthy **things in contrast** to those things we are so tempted to think? Will we allow our anxious thoughts to draw our attention to **the beauty and glory of Christ**?

Do we really think that God knows what He is doing?

We need to see at the end of the day the grace that this passage is to us. It is like the mother telling the child, you cannot have the cookie. But you can have this **whole back yard** full of untold adventure.

Paul draws our attention from the **misery we will create for ourselves** with holding the **wrong** perspective, to **the glories of Christ** and **the reality of the eternal perspective**. That is what this is all about.

Paul avails to us a wonderful, wonderful, **peace of God** and the **God of peace**. And it is better than we can imagine.