

Series: The Fellowship of the Gospel	Reference: <i>Philippians 4:8-9 & 11-13</i>	Title: You Are What You Eat	Date: 11.22.2020
Website Writeup: You are what you eat...fill your heart & mind with the thoughts of God, take on the mind of Christ & you will find peace, contentment & become a powerful witness for Jesus!			

Today's the end of our study of Philippians. We find ourselves in chapter 4, verses 8-9 then we'll skip to 11-13. If you'd like to turn there now...p804 in your pew Bibles. In my reading for today, I need to give credit to R. Kent Hughes from his book on Philippians. This sermon is laden with many of his words.¹ I tweaked it here & there but when you find something good, use it & give credit.

Read along with me as Paul says...*Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me - practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.*

The human brain has as many as fourteen billion cells, each one constantly making as many as 10,000 connections with other cells - an unparalleled computer. It's been compared to 1,000 switchboards, each big enough to serve New York City. There's more electronic equivalent in one human brain than in all the radio & television stations of the entire world put together! Capable of receiving all levels of input - from creating great works of art & receiving messages from God Himself, which no computer could accomplish.

The height of its potential as Paul indicates is to take on the mind of Christ through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Constantly being renewed & transformed into His likeness (1 Co 2:16, Ro 12:2). That grey mass between your ears was created to have the mind of Christ. But often, we don't reflect this. Paul reminds, it's imperative to willingly & obediently invite Christ to take over our minds. *Proverbs 4:23 warns, "Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it." Your heart & mind are one & the same - we're not speaking of our physical heart, but our minds, the seat of all emotion & thought.*

When Jesus quoted Israel's great Shema, He said, *"And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind ..."* (Mark 12:30). 'Mind' was His addition. He wants & demands to take charge of our minds for His glory & our good! Remember the conflict between Euodia & Syntyche we looked at last week was threatening the unity of the Philippian church. Last week Paul gave us five imperatives which, if obeyed, would bring them peace; 1) to stand firm in Christ 2) rejoice, 3) be gentle, 4) not to be anxious, and 5) constant prayer.

¹ R. Kent Hughes, *Philippians: The Fellowship of the Gospel, Preaching the Word* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 173-189.

Implemented well, Paul promised, *“the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts & your minds in Christ Jesus”* (v. 7). Now Paul exhorts us to embrace exalted thoughts & practices which enhance God’s presence & peace. And promised in verse 9: *“What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me - practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.”*

These six virtues Paul lists are qualities the Greco-Roman culture itself held high. It’s language the surrounding culture could understand. They’d been created in the image of God, and had remnant of that in their souls. Anything good in the world is God authored from the beginning, not of human construction. If something’s good, it reflects the heart of God, which people may not recognize. Paul’s claiming these six virtues as marks of Christian thinking & character.

He’s calling Euodia & Syntyche, and the Philippian church, to not only the Christian life, but to influence the surrounding culture. The intention’s that *“in the midst of a crooked & twisted generation”* the Philippians would *“shine as lights in the world”* (cf. 2:15). An attractive ethical life is powerful evangelism in an unbelieving culture. When all this is modeled well, it thumps with power. And, Paul always had in mind Jesus’ last command, our first concern in Matthew 28:18-20 - The Great Commission, where Jesus says, *“All authority in heaven & on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go & make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”*

Today, Paul gives us six powerful thoughts to assimilate in order for God’s mission to be carried out without hinderance. Firstly, the Philippians must contemplate *whatever’s true*. Truth in the most comprehensive sense. For followers of Christ, truth begins with Jesus’ divine person as God the Son, the embodiment of truth. He’s all truth, and His gospel is truth. As Colossians 1:5 says... *“the word of the truth, the gospel.”* Jesus states God’s word “is truth” in John 17:17. Everything true is from God - all truth is His.

Therefore, a mind which contemplates truth, not only sees Christ, the Word & gospel as ultimate guiding truth, but also engages God’s creation, rejects irrational thinking & speaks truth. This mind seeks whatever’s true in every avenue of life, from faith, science, relationships, public life & business. I stopped behind a car at a stoplight this week. One bumpersticker read, *“I support the separation of Church & Hate.”* Another said, *“The great thing about science is that it’s true whether you believe it or not.”* Obviously a person who has an ax to grind with the church & regards Christianity as anti-science. Something I’ve never understood - we aren’t anti-science. Christians have fostered the pursuit of knowledge & truth through the scientific process throughout history. The fly in the ointment concerning a deep trust in science, is that it’s a humanistic endeavor done by faulty humans who make mistakes & tend to take theories as absolute truth. Simply Google scientific theories which’ve been overturned & you’ll find a healthy list.

Second, Paul's readers must focus on *whatever's honorable*. The Greek word here translated *honorable* is used in epistles to teach what those who are older & in leadership must be like (Titus 2:2; 1 Timothy 3:8, 11). So the word signifies a personal moral excellence that's dignified & worthy of honor. A noble life of spiritual gravitas evoking honor, the opposite of ignoble. The Philippians are to focus on whatever's dignified, noble, honorable & to aspire to such character.

Third, they were to concentrate on *whatever's just*. For Paul, that which is just, or right is defined by the character of God. But he also used just or right in the sense of right thought or action (1:7). The Philippians were to contemplate the things which make for just living - in short, doing the right thing.

Fourth, the readers were to focus on *whatever's pure*. Not limited to sexual purity, but extending to all areas of moral purity in thought, speech & action - to focus on that which isn't tainted with evil.

Fifth, the Philippians were to contemplate *whatever's lovely*. Attractive things, including not only what's morally lovely, but also aesthetic, all the beauty of creation & humanity - from sunsets, to great works of art, music, caring for the poor, speaking out for the powerless - anything beautiful, either moral or aesthetic.

Sixth, Paul's readers were to consider *whatever's commendable*, referring to the kind of conduct spoken highly of by other people.

These six qualities are what Paul desired for his readers, a challenging outline of how we must think, which Paul then framed with a comprehensive summary & command: "*if there's any excellence, if there's anything worthy of praise, think about these things*" (v. 8b). Nothing of moral excellence, or that would earn the praise of God or man must be left out of Christian thought-life. And he urges us to think continually on these things.

Euodia & Syntyche, immersed in conflict, hadn't been thinking high thoughts of each other. But if they could take the challenge, beginning to think thoughts like these, they'd find reconciliation more easily in relationship. And as the Philippians began to think upon & live out these virtues, the light of the gospel could influence the surrounding culture through them well. Witness is comprehensive & begins with the internal transformation of our minds into the likeness of Christ as seen in thought & action.

Our culture often presents the antithesis of Paul's list. We've become increasingly eroticized, violent & intolerant of Jesus' ways. Often we can't tell the difference between Christians & non-Christians, our minds too have become increasingly eroticized & blasphemous - with thinking often unworthy of the calling we've received. The Psalmist says in 101:2b & 3a, "*I will walk with integrity of heart within my house; I will not set before my eyes anything that is worthless.*" Jesus said it even more intensely, "*If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out & throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell*" (Matthew 5:29).

Speaking hypothetically, Jesus' words bring to light the imperative of taking on His mind. Since it plays out in relationships & witness of the church. Are you overtly negative, anxious, angry, or the like? Choose to think well. Are you tempted to sin in certain situations? Choose to make better decisions because the Christian life is one of self-denial, of turning away from those things opposite of Paul's list.

The greatest remedy for all this is time spent reading & meditating on Scripture. Jesus embodies Scriptural truth, and time spent in His word is essential to the Christian life. We often choose not to hide His Word in our hearts so that we might not sin against Him as David said in Psalm 119:11. We aren't influenced by that which we don't know. If you're not spending time with Jesus, you're not knowing Jesus & not becoming like Him. There may be some osmosis going on by coming to church or Community Group, but our walk should be an intentional pursuit of Jesus in all moments. A little effort goes a long way.

Hiding God's Word in our hearts, making time for quiet meditation in our day. Reading & rereading passages, listening to the Spirit, turning His thoughts over in our minds, praying over a word or a phrase. Remember what Francis Chan said, "If I come across something in Scripture I disagree with, I must assume I'm wrong, and not Scripture." The call is to acquaint ourselves with all of God's Word via daily immersion. Five pages a day will take you through the whole Bible in a year! We're called to *take every thought captive to obey Christ* in 2 Corinthians 10:5.

One way for this to work out practically is to memorize Scripture such as 1 Corinthians 10:13, "*No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.*" A verse which helps us to avoid thoughts & choices damaging to us & others. Immersion in God's word is necessary to counteract all the putridity we swim in otherwise.

Here again Paul's charge to think about whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely & commendable is powerfully phrased because "*think about these things*" uses the Greek word (*logizomai*) from which we get the English word *logarithm*. Paul commands the same deliberate, contemplation of these virtues it takes to work out a math problem.

Paul lived out each of the six 'whatever' qualities he was calling his readers to ponder. He had the mind of Christ. Contemplating whatever was true, he lived it. He thought & lived honorably, justly, purely, pondered the lovely & commendable, and lived these attributes. The Philippians saw this. He presents his life as a living example to imitate... "*What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me - practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you*" (v. 9). The six virtues weren't exalted abstractions for esoteric contemplation. They are to be lived out in the flesh & blood of the Christians life. Taking on the mind of Christ transforms how we live, and speaks worlds to others around us.

They had his personal example present or away. They knew Paul's character & conduct, bravery, how he faced trials, devotion, prayer, patient suffering & resiliency. When he was with them, they saw his godly example & his modeling of the virtues he presses upon them - a pattern of an excellent & worthy life.

So, Paul commanded & promised, *"practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you"* (v. 9b). The truth is, we've not learned them until we've lived them. "Noble thoughts are of little value unless they be translated into deeds." (Strauss). Paul's addressed anxiety plenty in this letter. To diminish anxiety in our lives, maybe it'd be good to memorize verses like Isaiah 41:10, *"...do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you & help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."* And believe it to the point it changes our outlook & choices!

These virtues become reality on the basis of the choices we make in everyday life with people around us. Paul calls us to overwrite the world's messages with these virtues & to put them into practice so that, in time, words like truth, justice & purity would be written large over our lives. If you want to be a person who reflects Jesus, and truly embraces things like diversity & justice (two cultural issues now), then take on the mind of Christ. It's much less about going on marches, or even changing laws, it's absolutely concerned with us becoming like Jesus. The end result is *"the God of peace will be with you."* In verse 7 Paul promised God's own personal peace & serenity. Here the reward is "the God of peace" *Himself*.

God's salvation garrisons our hearts as Paul said in v7. Here it's His presence which blesses & saves. God's peace & presence can't be separated. They're one as God's gift. And when His peace firmly reigns in the local church, it'll radiate the light of Christ to others. Right now, with politics & COVID-19, the world around us needs peace & serenity, and much less anxiety! Personal spiritual formation in Christ, taking on these attributes in thought, is not only the path to peace & serenity, but the best witness to the world!

The matter of our minds is of utmost importance. There must be a conscious rejection of all that's not consonant with the mind of Christ, replacing it with conscious high thoughts in Jesus. Thinking leads to daily practice so that the mind of Christ emanates from us to a lost world. Our witness becomes practical, ethical & powerful so that we can fulfill our calling in Matthew 28:18-20 to go & make disciples of all nations!

Paul then makes the statement in 4:11-13...*"I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. ¹²I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any & every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. ¹³I can do all this through him who gives me strength."* Another great set of verses to memorize!

The Stoics regarded contentment as the essence of all virtues. For them contentment described the mindset of the person who'd become independent of all things & people. Stoics said, "Man should be sufficient unto himself for all things, and able, by the power

of his will, to resist the force of circumstances.” The Stoic ideal was a kind of self-contained superman able to rise above it all in independent self-sufficiency. That may work for a time, but as COVID hits, we all know that’s nothing but prideful malarky.

Paul redefined contentment as Christ-centered. God-sufficient vs. self-sufficient. Contentment’s rooted in God rather than temporal self. So, while Paul & the Stoics may appear to be close in thought, they’re actually worlds apart! Paul’s sufficient & content, not because he’s independent, but because he’s totally dependent upon Christ, and interdependent in Christian fellowship as the Spirit works through it. Given the unparalleled miseries & joys he experienced, this affirmation of continual contentment is amazing - a statement no honest Stoic could ever make! And contentment is available to anyone in Christ.

Paul’s point is Christian contentment remains a mystery to those outside Jesus & can only be learned by those in Christ. It comes only through knowing Jesus. Paul had come to know the secret of contentment over time. His learning was part of his spiritual growth & sanctification. The question for us is, have we learned this secret?

As a result of all this Paul says, “I can do all things.” That’s not to say he can jump off a cliff, flap his arms & fly, but rather, that statements controlled by context. Paul’s confident he’ll be divinely strengthened to do anything *God calls* him to do. Not only could Paul be content & confident in every circumstance, he could also be sure he’d be equipped with divine power to deal with it. Paul says much the same thing in Colossians 1:28-29 where he reveals that it’s Christ who sustains his active ministry: *“Him we proclaim, warning everyone & teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.”* Paul toils & struggles, straining with all his might, but it’s the energy & power of Christ which strengthens him!

Do you want contentment & peace no matter what you face? Do you want to live the adventure of being a powerful witness to others? Do you realize these things are available in Christ?

If so, then *“...whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.”* Follow Paul’s example & *“practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.”*

Guard what you fill your mind with, think good thoughts about others, spend daily time in the Word privately & with others, take all your requests to God in prayer - let Him fight your battles. Assimilate the mind of Christ into your life because you are what you eat...fill your heart & mind with the thoughts of God & you’ll find peace, contentment & become a powerful witness for Jesus!