

# [ the mentalist ]

## :: philippians 4.8 ::

Back in Philippians this morning, with just a few more verses till we meet the end of this series. Paul is giving us a reminder of what Christ intends to do with His people for eternity and how that process is meant to be developing now, as we live out our lives on the earth.

The Christian life isn't just a ticket counter purchase, where, 'well, now I'm a Christian and I don't have to go to hell after I die.' Instead, it's an enrollment into an incredible life and lifestyle that is fundamentally and profoundly different than life without Christ. It's like all those movies where the hero gets accepted into the ultra-elite, ultra-secret special forces unit that those on the outside didn't even know existed.

But the difference is, the Christian life as God describes it through Paul is not something hidden. It's not only for the best of the best. It is available to all. That's the message that Paul has been getting at as he details the sort of power and purpose and Presence we have as believers. This letter is meant as a teaching, yes, but it's a reminder of what God intends every Christian to be. And when we miss out on these spiritual blessings or gifts that God has provided, it's not because we fail to earn God's favor, it's because we fail to receive what God has already given us. So, Paul gives us all these situations and examples and guidelines so that we're fortified as believers and in tune with the heart of God so that the conformation and development He wants to do in our lives can go on without being hindered by sin or hindered by these other distractions that are all around us.

Our text this morning is only one verse, but it's a doosie. Philippians 4 verse 8, a well-known, often quoted and memorized passage, which reads:

**Philippians 4.8 - 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.**

The 'finally' we've seen before, back in chapter 3 when Paul started wrapping up his thoughts, only to be filled up by the Holy Spirit to share about how we minister and how to press on and our citizenship in heaven and our unity in the church among other things. So, here again, he comes to finally. And he's going to talk about our thought life and our generosity toward the work of the ministry.

Now, when I hear the word 'finally' in a speech or see it in an article, it usually means that there's one more point that the speaker is going to drive home. One last idea that ties together what's been said.

But with Paul, this isn't the case. *Finally*, be at unity with one another. *Finally*, press on toward the goal. *Finally*, rejoice in the Lord. *Finally* beware of evil workers. *Finally*, control your thought life. All points he's made since his original finally in chapter 3.

To me it was a reminder that living the Christian life, having a Spirit-filled faith isn't about one thing. There's no single issue that we're to focus on while neglecting the others. Because our God is not the God of a single situation.

Pagan gods usually are. You look at the Greeks or the Egyptians or tribal cultures or other polytheists, and you discover that they have a different god for each situation.

'Well, over here is the god of the harvest. Over here is the god of the sea. Over here is the god of thunder. Over here is the sun god and the moon god and whatever else.'

But Jehovah comes to us and says, 'I created you and everything around you, and My intention is to be Lord over your entirety.' God wants to revolutionize our marriages **and** our occupations **and** our parenting **and** our citizenship **and** our ministry in the church **and** our finances **and** our thought life **and** everything else. He's leaving no stone of our lives unturned because He has better for us. He has more for us than humanity. But it requires that we actually relinquish our lives over to His total control. When we don't, we're treating God like pagans did. Like a vending machine that fulfills some desire or need we have. But what God is offering us is completely different. Our lives can't be the same as they were before salvation with a few improvements. He is transferring us from one kingdom to another, making us new creations.

So, this morning, Paul turns our attention to the thought life.

Rather than just go through and do a word study on each of these, I wanted to focus on the importance of thought. Because each of these words is pretty straightforward. And instead of dissecting each word, which is something I enjoy doing, I believe it's more important to understand what Paul is doing. Because throughout this letter we've seen him give us some very pointed and very matter of fact language. I've tried to highlight those passages, where Paul speaks in absolute terms to us.

This verse is one of those. He invites us to look within and evaluate our thought life. Day to day. Minute to minute. What is my mind filled with? What is the character of the conversation I keep with myself each day? How am I thinking about God and myself and others?

Because the thought life will determine much of our submission to and success in the Lord.

After all, what is the greatest commandment? To love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. That's what Jesus said in Matthew 22. He was of course referencing Deuteronomy 6, which includes that we are to love the Lord with all our strength, but even so, heart, soul, mind, strength. 3 internal efforts, 1 external effort. The Christian life is lived from the inside out, never the opposite. When asked what is the greatest thing we can do, what is the meaning of life, Jesus said, love God with what's within you and then, from that power and filling, love others as much as you love yourself.

These are certain and absolute terms. Because:

**Proverbs 23.7a - For as [a man] thinks in his heart, so is he.**

and:

**Luke 6.45 - A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.**

Progress in the Christian life is first made within the heart and mind. When we determine to relinquish our whole entirety to God and His plan and His commands. That's when we move forward.

Paul says to us this morning that we must take captive our thoughts and filter them through Godliness. And he gives us this list so that we can easily determine whether we're filling our thoughts with things that are Godly or things that are not. Those thoughts that are not godly are earthly and are in competition for your allegiance and your heart. They cause us to regress away from the Lord and toward other things.

And, again, Paul has not directed this mindset to a select few. He directs it to the 'brethren.' Are you a Christian? Then we are brothers. And all of us are called to a thought-life that is faithfully focused on Christ. Who He is, where He is and what He is doing.

Those thoughts I'm thinking...that conversation I'm having with myself which fuels my words and my actions toward others, are they heavenly, acceptable, clean thoughts? Are they honorable? Are they friendly? Are they holy? Are they hopeful? Are they true?

Bible commentators and Christian authors have pointed out that so much of the trouble we get into as believers is rooted in the fact that we focus on things that are not *true*. We worry about what **MIGHT** come to pass, but haven't. Those things aren't true. They're speculation. Yet so much of our lives are consumed with worry. I know mine is. And I know that's something that God desires to true out of my heart as He works in me to deal with something that isn't heavenly.

Obviously, we cannot achieve a perfect state of Godly thought this side of eternity. But that's not what we're being asked to do. What we're being asked to do by God is to pause and understand that He desires our whole being. That He wants to revolutionize everything about our lives, down to the thoughts we think. And we can move forward in spiritual progress by taking a look at what we're thinking and evaluating whether our thoughts are like this list in Philippians 4.8 or whether they're something else.

If we do that, we'll see very quickly if we're filling our lives with negativity and complaining and filthiness. And that's not what we want. Of course we *want* what God is offering.

But as we've seen again and again, conformation and sanctification don't happen on their own. Filthiness happens on its own. What Christ desires to do in and through us requires that we participate and actively allow ourselves to be changed by His Spirit and the power of His word, which are both readily available to each of us right now.

We can't be disciples and not care about the content of our thoughts. We can't see Divine appointments and know more clearly the heart of God if we're meditating on dishonorable, unheavenly, negative and carnal things.

So, Paul invites us again to choose this day how we will fill ourselves and how we will interact with the indwelling Holy Spirit.

I said I wasn't going to do a word study, but this one point is too good to pass up. The Greek word used for 'virtue' there at the end of the verse is **arete**, which can be translated as *manliness*.

And to me, it's a wonderful idea for us to take hold of. Will our thoughts be characteristic of the old man, with his lusts and sin, or will they be characteristic of the new man, born again into the Kingdom of God, given God's special revelation and His continual presence?

If we want victory, if we want maturity, if we want progress instead of regress, the change begins within, and we are companions with God who are called to take up a cross and move forward on the disciple road actively and purposely.

So today, think compassion instead of criticism. Think Biblically instead of lustfully. Think future, not failure. Think about Jesus today. Who He is, where He is and what He's done. Take your thoughts captive and submit your mind, your heart and your soul to His word and His presence and see how God takes that internal submission and turns it into spiritual fruit which blesses those around you.