

Philippians 4 pt. 2 v.8-9

We find ourselves in the final stretch of Paul's letter to the Philippians. This is a portion of Scripture that, if we are not careful, can be skimmed over quickly because we simply assume that we get the point. We assume that we know what Paul is driving at. However, this brief two verse pericope deserves our full attention.

The challenging thing about this text and Paul's admonition to the church to "set their minds on things above," (to borrow a phrase from Colossians 3:2) is that seasoned believers know the principals presented, at least theoretically. BUT, we all find this admonition to higher thinking quite difficult to adopt in our own lives.

The draw towards everything else is so strong that our flesh rebels and we find ourselves meditating upon, dabbling in, quite unwholesome material. (Gal 5:17)

There are so many things competing for our attention and our affection. Not all competing interests are bad. There are just as many noble pursuits competing for our interest and those things

can dominate or undermine our personal devotional time just as much as any sin.

The reality is that we live in an age where knowledge has increased and continues to increase (at least ostensibly) but wisdom and discernment doesn't seem to be increasing at an equitable rate. (Dan 12:4)

Because of the rise of worldwide instant communication and social media everybody has been given a platform for a relatively low cost and low risk of adverse consequence for propagating ignorance.

Supposedly there is an old Yiddish proverb that says, "Every village has its village idiot."

Now, in the days of old everybody in the village knew who their idiot was! But now every village idiot gets a platform to share their idiocy with the world and we, not being from their village, find it more and more difficult to discern who is legitimate and who is, well...an idiot.

We have created a perfect storm of questionable content to cloud our minds -- nearly unlimited access to communication tools, lack of context, expansive reach/distribution, and, I would argue, the most important ingredient to this storm...relativism regarding truth, facts, morality and justice.

According to Statista.com, “As of May 2019, more than 500 hours of video were uploaded to YouTube every minute. This equates to approximately 30,000 hours [4.7 yrs!] of newly uploaded content per hour.”¹

“Americans aged 18 and older spend more than four hours a day watching TV, still beating the three hours and 45 minutes they interact with their smartphone on an average”²

If you care to look there are further disturbing statistics on the proliferation of adult content that are actually not shocking at all.

One of the problems with addressing the issue of “setting our minds on things above,” is that we all gather around and act like it's not a problem - like we've all got it under control.

¹ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/259477/hours-of-video-uploaded-to-youtube-every-minute/>

² <https://www.statista.com/chart/15224/daily-tv-consumption-by-us-adults/>

Instead of transparently bringing truth and freedom to an ugly situation what our hesitancy does is causes people who want to open up about their struggles and temptations to clam up because they feel ashamed and they don't want to be ostracized by people that they view as having it "all under control."

This common behavior, especially within the church, pushes the sinner into a depressive cycle where they wonder what's wrong with them and why they can't get it together when seemingly everybody else is doing just fine.

We started with the easy fun stuff, TV, internet, cell-phones. Let's talk about that thing nobody wants to talk about.

Here's some data from an organization called Covenant Eyes.

64% of Christian men and **15% of Christian women** say they watch porn at least once a month.

1 in 5 youth pastors and **1 in 7 senior pastors** use porn on a regular basis and are currently struggling. That's more than 50,000 U.S. church leaders.³

³ <https://www.covenanteyes.com/pornstats/>

This is real. It's happening. It's awkward...but only because we let it be. Christ has set us free, so then let us be free and honest and open. It's time to let go of our momentary icky feelings in obedience to God's word to bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ (Gal 6:1-2)

Let us consider the depth and practicality of this call to meditate on those things that are praiseworthy which is all bound up in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Let us enter into this study acknowledging Paul's words to the Corinthians, "...we have the mind of Christ." (1 Cor 2:16)

Since we have the mind of Christ then this task is not too difficult for us nor is it outside of our grasp as we rely on the Holy Spirit and the grace of God to carry us. BUT, we must set our hand to the plough in this regard, we must take part in Christ's holiness with our whole self - including our minds - if we hope to find any progress in this area that we are so lovingly called to.

V.8 - Paul instructs this First Century church, surrounded by pagan worship, ritual prostitution, idolatry, and wantonness to

elevate their thinking and he gives them practical instruction on how they might know that they are on the right path.

We must say up front that all of these characteristics under consideration are once and for all commended to the Philippians by way of MEDITATION. The Philippians are commanded to take account of these attributes as they interact with the world around them, with God's word, with one another, etc. and to do something with this information...namely to MEDITATE.

Don't be scared of that word it is used in Scripture and we have a claim to meditation in its fullest, rightest, most holy sense.

The term means, "to think about something in a detailed and logical manner—to think about, to reason about, to ponder, reasoning."⁴ It carries the weight of, "reflect[ing] carefully upon [these things] in order that they may shape your conduct. These good qualities are not merely things that are good for the head, but things that need to be transformed into action [and this term] has the force of continual action (... "your thoughts must continually dwell on ...")."⁵

⁴ λογίζομαι; λογισμός, οὖν - Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 350.

⁵ I-Jin Loh and Eugene Albert Nida, *A Handbook on Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1995), 133.

The first characteristic worthy of continual meditation is that whatever we are thinking about is to be TRUE. We live in an age of “truthiness, half-truths, and alternative facts.” Let us look toward that which is true. This isn’t too difficult for us to grasp.

Remember it was Pontius Pilate, upon hearing Jesus proclaim, “...everyone who is of the truth hears my voice,” asked that ancient question that people think makes them sound so original, “What is truth?” (John 18:37-38)

Truth is knowable, it is real, substantial and edifying to the soul. Let us set our minds on things that are true.

Are you unsure of what is true? Look to the things that you KNOW are true and meditate on those: Christ, God’s Word, the Spirit of Truth, to name a few.

The next characteristic is NOBLE -- “...pertaining to appropriate, befitting behavior and implying dignity and respect—‘honorable, worthy of respect, of good character.’⁶ This same term is used to

⁶ “σεμνός” - Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 747.

describe the character required of deacons within the church in 1 Tim 3:8, "...deacons are to be dignified."

This removes those things from our thought life that are debased, debasing, or dehumanizing.

I must reiterate that all of these attributes may be applied directly to Christ in their fullest sense. He is the dignified one who is worthy of honor. He is the true one, and He is all of these other attributes that we are examining.

Moreover, the church is admonished to consider and reflect upon those things that are JUST. That means what is RIGHT and FAIR.⁷

Do not wallow in the depravity of injustice. God is just, He is righteous and He is making us like Him. True justice has a place in God's kingdom and He is the one who will make it so. God's people are a people who appreciate and think about that which is JUST, RIGHT, and FAIR.

⁷ William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 246.

Whatever things are PURE should also occupy our headspace. This word (ἁγνά//agna) is closely associated with the Greek term for holiness (ἅγιος//agios). It conveys the thought of that which is “without blemish or moral defect.”⁸

Holiness, purity, is important to God. It is who He is! And we cannot be in His presence if we are not holy!

That doesn't mean when we mess up that we are immediately removed from His presence. God Forbid! He imparted Christ's righteousness to us so that we can stand in His presence. The question we must wrestle with is...how far are we willing to go in our own lives so that we might press into the holiness He has provided for us?

As Peter writes, “[1Pe 1:15-16 NKJV] ...as He who called you [is] holy, you also be holy in all [your] conduct, 16 because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy."

Holiness seems unattainable but it is gifted to us and we must walk in holiness with our Lord shunning those unclean things around us even though they call out to us so deceptively, like the

⁸ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 745.

immoral woman from Prov. 7. Take the path to her house and be struck down.

[Pro 7:21-27 NKJV] 21 With her enticing speech she caused him to yield, With her flattering lips she seduced him. 22 Immediately he went after her, as an ox goes to the slaughter, Or as a fool to the correction of the stocks, 23 Till an arrow struck his liver. As a bird hastens to the snare, He did not know it [would cost] his life. 24 Now therefore, listen to me, [my] children; Pay attention to the words of my mouth: 25 Do not let your heart turn aside to her ways, Do not stray into her paths; 26 For she has cast down many wounded, And all who were slain by her were strong [men]. 27 Her house [is] the way to hell, Descending to the chambers of death.

Purity matters to God. The warnings He gives throughout Scripture are plain. AND, if you care to consider the remarkable structure of Proverbs keep in mind that the chapter immediately following the tempting immoral woman is the voice of another woman calling out in the street...Lady Wisdom...

[Pro 8:2-6 NKJV] 2 She takes her stand on the top of the high hill, Beside the way, where the paths meet. 3 She cries out by the

gates, at the entry of the city, At the entrance of the doors: 4 "To you, O men, I call, And my voice [is] to the sons of men. 5 O you simple ones, understand prudence, And you fools, be of an understanding heart. 6 Listen, for I will speak of excellent things, And from the opening of my lips [will come] right things;

Who are we going to listen too?

The next thing Paul implores the Philippians to consider are all those things that are LOVELY. That is, things that are pleasing along with all of the other attributes he has set forth. We wouldn't consider things that please us in a sinful way to be lovely but rather those things created by God that are exceptional, delightful, agreeable, and moving.⁹

Additionally we are to consider those things that are of GOOD REPORT, or admirable, commendable.

We move to Paul's final couplet - virtue and praise. The six above characteristics are virtuous in themselves. But, as one source points out, up until this point Paul has used all adjectives -

⁹ William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 886.

describing words - as he details for the Philipian church the ethical practicalities of following Jesus with our minds.¹⁰

These final two terms are nouns in the original language: virtue and praise.

We are to be a people who consider and reflect upon VIRTUE.

What does that mean? Perhaps that is a good place to start meditating. What is the meaning of Christ centered virtue. One lexicon suggests that the term specifically denotes, “uncommon character worthy of praise...”¹¹

The Greek philosophers of the 4th century BC, led by Plato, believed in four cardinal virtues: wisdom, courage, moderation and justice.

While that’s interesting we are still left with the question...what is Christian virtue? Perhaps we have marched around that question

¹⁰I-Jin Loh and Eugene Albert Nida, *A Handbook on Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1995), 132.

¹¹ William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 130.

all morning. Some have suggested that we just add faith, hope, and love to those four and call it good! (1 Cor 13:13)

Considering the depth and breadth of Christian virtue is far more involved than our time allows...perhaps that's Paul's point after all, to stimulate the thought life of those Jesus followers who wanted to know the answer!

Look to your teacher, dear one! The Spirit and the Word!

Lastly, we are to consider PRAISE in our thought lives.

Yes, we are a people of praise. We have incorporated praise into our worship services and our daily lives. We've incorporated praise into our prayer lives even. BUT...what is PRAISE? What is it meant for? Chew on that! That is the beginning of meditating upon praise.

V.9 - After such a brief line on meditation Paul urges the church once again to join in following his example (Phil 3:17).

You see, Paul himself was committed to this pattern of setting his mind on things above, on holy things. He didn't live a wealthy life

because of it. He certainly didn't escape suffering because of it. But, Paul was convinced that the God of peace remained near to him as he reflected deeply upon holy things.

Why? Well, Paul was an example of pressing into the life that he described this morning, one that was true, noble, just, pure, lovely, of good report, founded upon the virtue and praise of Christ. Paul was drawing near to God intentionally.

Everything else that competed for Paul's affection he counted as rubbish...but you already knew that didn't you (Phil 3:7)?

We are promised that if we draw near to God, He will draw near to us. (Jas 4:8)

Now, this text to meditate upon these things continually is a big admonition - choose holiness, shun filth - set your mind on things above! We try to do this in our own lives. We even try to follow after Paul as he asks the Philippians to do! And then we get tired of it or we fail and then we feel miserable, wretched, ashamed or like we're hypocrites fulfilling the stereotype that the world has assigned to Christians.

At that moment it sure doesn't feel like the God of peace is with us and if He is only with us when we are getting straight A's in the morality and meditation department then we are doomed!

Well...Paul felt this way too.

[Rom 7:21-25 NKJV] 21 I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. 22 For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. 23 But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. 24 O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? 25 I thank God--through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin. [Rom 8:1-4 NKJV] 1 [There is] therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. 3 For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God [did] by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh..."