

Think and Act as Christians!

For: Voice of the Church

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The Christian church preaches Christ crucified and risen – Christ died on the cross for the sins of fallen mankind and arose from the grave as the Victor over Satan, sin, and death. The Apostle Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:17 that “...if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.” What does that look like? How is the gospel of the crucified and risen Christ supposed to impact our daily lives?

Paul tells us in Philippians 4:8,9, where he writes: “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.”

Paul begins by saying, “Finally, brothers...” (Php 4:8). He has come almost to the end of his letter. Paul gives some broad and comprehensive instructions at the end, as evident from the use of the word “whatever” six times and the word “any” and “anything” – “...*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” (Php 4:8).

Taken out of context, these qualities could be taken as a list of humanistic qualities praised in the Greek-speaking society of which Philippi was a part. The Greek-speaking world valued what is true, honourable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, and praiseworthy. Paul, however, is referring to something much deeper because he is writing within the context of the gospel! He writes these words to the Philippians because of their “...partnership in the gospel...” (Php 1:5). All Christians are partners in the gospel.

The gospel of the crucified and risen Christ changes everything in our lives! Of ourselves we are dead in sin and misery but, as Paul says in this letter, God’s Son came into the world and humbled himself and became obedient even to death on a cross (Php 2:8). We are saved by grace through faith because the gospel is about “...the righteousness from God that depends on faith...” (Php 3:9). Christ’s resurrection raises us up to a new life, and Paul speaks about wanting to know “...the power of [Christ’s] resurrection...” (Php 3:10).

Christians are a new creation in Christ. That’s why Paul says in Philippians 1:27, “...let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ...” And that’s why Paul writes in Philippians 4:8,9 that we are to think and act as Christians.

Therefore, there is a very deep meaning to what Paul says in regard to thinking about whatever is true, honourable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, and praiseworthy. Above all, this means that we are to reflect on the redeeming work of Jesus Christ, which is the epitome of what is honourable, pure, lovely, and excellent! And from there, this command percolates down to every aspect of our lives.

Our whole life must bear the stamp of the gospel, and this means that all our thoughts must be in harmony with the gospel. That's why Paul says in Philippians 1:9,10, "And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge *and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent*, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ..." That's about thinking.

Paul tells us to think about the grace that is ours in Christ Jesus and the impact that is to have on our lives. Christians cannot go through life in a thoughtless way. For a Christian, life is not only about food, clothing, and shelter; it's not only about work and play. Our whole life is to be affected by the gospel of salvation, and that requires thought and reflection. That's why Paul writes in Ephesians 4:22-24, "[you were taught]...to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, *and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds*, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness." That's about our thoughts.

We are sometimes (maybe often?) inclined to compartmentalize our lives by treating the LORD's service as just one more component or compartment of our lives – as if it is an add-on. In this way, we think the thoughts of God on Sunday, but on Monday we do our own thing without much regard for what we heard on Sunday. But the service of the LORD must permeate our entire lives!

Let's look at some examples. The gospel is supposed to impact how we relate as husbands and wives. Do we think about the fact that Christian marriages are supposed to be a reflection of the beautiful relationship between Christ and his church? The gospel is supposed to impact how we conduct ourselves at work. Do Christian employees think about being honest, reliable, and hardworking because they are ultimately working for Christ? Do Christian employers think about being fair and flexible toward their employees? The gospel is supposed to impact the kind of entertainment we seek. Do we think about whether our entertainment can stand the test of purity and whether we would want to die doing that activity? The gospel is supposed to impact how we spend our money. Do we think about the fact that we are stewards of the money God gives us?

Let's ask ourselves some more questions. Are our thoughts filled with discontentment? Is it never enough – who we are and what we have? Are our thoughts filled with jealousy? Boys and girls, are you jealous of the things other kids have? It's no different for adults; it's just that adults covet bigger things. Do we fill our thoughts with pornographic images, either from the internet or conjured up by our own imagination? Do we have hateful thoughts toward those who disagree with us and hold different views? Are we resisting all those sinful thoughts?

The standard for what is true, honourable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, and praiseworthy is God's holy and perfect law – the Ten Commandments. Christ our Saviour revealed the depth of God's law throughout his ministry on this earth, especially in the well-known Sermon on the Mount in which Christ penetrated to the thoughts of our heart. To know what is excellent and to think the thoughts of God after him, we must read and study the Word of God. Only then will we know what is pleasing and right in God's sight. Christian parents are called to train their children in the thoughts and ways of the LORD. And this means that we must pray to God for the guidance of the Holy Spirit as we think about the Word of God.

So, that's all about our *thoughts*. Paul, however, goes on to write about our *actions* when he says in Philippians 4:9, "What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me – *practice* these

things...” Paul doesn’t only tell us to make whatever is pleasing to God the focus of our *thoughts*, but also to *act* according to it. It is not sufficient to *know* what is pure and commendable, but we must also *do* what is pure and commendable. We may not pull thoughts and actions – or doctrine and practice -- apart; Paul’s reference to both thinking and acting *shows* that they belong together.

The Apostle Paul emphasizes what the Philippians have received from him by using four words for the same basic idea. He says: “What you have *learned* and *received* and *heard* and *seen* in me – practice these things...” (Php 4:9). Paul could have said it with one word, but he chose to say it with four to emphasize the point. These words express what was handed to them by Paul, either by his teaching or by his lifestyle. It’s as if Paul is saying what he said in Philippians 3:17, “Brothers, join in imitating me...”

Paul thought deeply about what he had in Christ, and Paul wanted to live close to Christ his Saviour. Paul wanted to be transformed in all his thoughts and actions by the power of the crucified and risen Christ. Paul wanted to live as someone spiritually raised from the dead! As Paul says in Philippians 3:10, “I want to know Christ – yes, to know the power of his resurrection...” (NIV). We must say it with Paul, and we must let that be reflected in our thoughts and actions.

Such a life is a blessed life, as Paul goes on to say when he speaks about our blessing. Philippians 4:9 ends with these words: ...and the God of peace will be with you.” The God who established peace between fallen people and himself through the redeeming work of Jesus Christ – the God of peace will be with us then.

Notice carefully the little word “and” with which the last part of Philippians 4:9 begins. Paul says, “...think about these things...practice these things, *and* the God of peace will be with you.” That means the blessing is conditional. Someone who was baptized long ago but is only a nominal Christian will not be blessed with the presence of God. The Christian faith must be reflected in our thoughts and actions. We must live it! Only then will God be with us and bless us.

Also in Old Testament times, God made clear that Israel could not presume upon automatic blessing because they were God’s people. We read this in Deuteronomy 11:26-28: “See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse: the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you today, and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the LORD your God...” As Psalm 1 says, the person who meditates on God’s law both day and night will be blessed because the LORD watches over his way. It’s in that same spirit that Paul writes.

All Christians stumble often in thoughts and actions. We cannot earn God’s blessing ourselves. Christ earned God’s blessing for all those who believe in him. Christ’s *thoughts* were always about things that are true, honourable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, and praiseworthy; Christ’s *actions* were always in accordance with such things. And Christ paid on the cross of Calvary for all our sinful thoughts and actions. In Christ, we have salvation!

The Christian, however, does strive in the power of the Holy Spirit to *think* and *act* in accordance with what Paul writes in Philippians 4:8,9 – not to earn salvation, but out of thankfulness for salvation. In Christ we are a new creation (2 Cor 5:17), and this must show in our lives. Such thoughts and actions as described by Paul are evidence of our faith in Christ. And when we have faith – as evident from our thoughts and actions – the God of peace is with us.

Think and act as Christians! Does that describe your life?
