Sermon Preparation – Philippians 4:8-9

Think on This

1) Each of the virtues listed in verse 8 are very similar. It is tempting to quickly read over them and simply group them together as “good things” to think about. However, there are many differences in the individual virtues. Briefly describe each virtue, listing the similarities and differences.

2) Reread verse 8. Is there a common denominator that ties all of these virtues together?

3) What makes something excellent or praiseworthy?

4) Reread verse 9. For the Philippians, what would be the result of putting into practice what they had seen in Paul, along with what they had learned, received, and heard from him?

5) Was God’s peaceful presence with the Philippians dependent upon their ability to put into practice what Paul had taught them?

6) Verses 4-7 and verses 8 and 9 are similar. Compare and contrast these two sections.
Others’ Thoughts

Excerpt from *The Purity Principle* by Randy Alcorn

“Filling Your Mind with Pure Thoughts”

“Just for a moment, I’d like you to follow my instruction. Ready? Okay…don’t think about snakes. Don’t—I repeat, do not—think about big, slimy snakes, coming up from your bathtub drain at night and slithering into your bed.

You hear me. Don’t think about snakes. Have I kept you from thinking about snakes? No. I’ve encouraged you to think about them.

Now, I want you to envision your favorite dessert. Perhaps it’s your mother’s Dutch apple pie, or chocolate chip cookies, or Jamoca Almond Fudge ice cream, or a Butterfinger Blizzard. Just think about that mouth-watering treat.

What happened in the last few moments? You’d forgotten all about those slithering snakes…until I mentioned them again.

Our minds are not vacuums. They will be filled with something. Impure though its are pushed out by pure thoughts:

“Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever, is pure…think about such things.”
- Philippians 4:8

It’s difficult to delete bad files in our brain’s hard drive, but we can restrict the number of new bad files. Then we can open many good files. This is cause and effect. The more we fill our minds with purity and the less with impurity, the greater our purity and resistance to temptation.

‘We take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ’ (2 Corinthians 10:5). When the wrong thoughts come, we correct them, replacing them with God’s truth.”

Excerpt from *Experiencing God Day by Day* by Henry T. Blackaby & Richard Blackaby

“What you think about in your unguarded moments reflects what your mind dwells upon. What you speak about when your guard is down is a good gauge of what is in your heart (Matt. 12:34). Your mind needs exercise just as your physical body does. To keep your body healthy, you must be careful what you put into it, and you must exercise regularly. To keep your thoughts pure, you must guard what goes into your mind. To exercise your mind, you must contemplate things that are noble and truths that stretch your mind.
Some Christians allow the world to fill their minds with ungodly thinking. Some people seem drawn to concentrate on the negative, choosing to be pessimistic about everything. Some remain satisfied with thinking of the mundane. Others fail to intentionally place Scripture in their thoughts, choosing instead to adopt human reasoning. Others, however, choose to expose their minds to the truths of God—to that which is true, noble, just, pure, lovely, and good.

The things you allow your mind to dwell on will be revealed by the way you live. If you focus on negative things, you will inevitably be a negative person. If you allow unholy thoughts to fill your mind, ungodliness will become common in your life.

If you fill your mind with thoughts of Christ, you will become Christ like. What you fill your mind with is a matter of choice. Choose to concentrate on the magnificent truths of God, and they will create in you a noble character that brings glory to God.”

Excerpt from Basics for Believers by D.A. Carson

“Resolve to Think Holy Thoughts”

“That, surely, is what Paul means: ‘Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things’ (4:8).

It always makes me fearful to remember that God knows my thoughts. Hebrews 4:13 reminds us, ‘Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.’ Small wonder that David, after his sin with Bathsheba, could write, ‘Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting’ (Ps. 139:23-24).

Clearly, David recognized not only that God knew his thoughts, but that any real reform in his life must begin with his thoughts. That is why the Lord Jesus taught, in the Sermon on the Mount, that murder can be traced to hate, and adultery to lust (Matt. 5:21-22,27-30). That is also why, from God’s perspective, the real measure of individuals, lies in what they think—not in what they own or in how well they deploy their gifts or even in what they do, but in what they think. If you think holy thoughts, you will be holy; if you think garbage, you will be garbage.

So it should come as no surprise that the prophets insist, ‘Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts’ (Isa. 55:7). One of the sovereign remedies against sin is to spend much time, thoughtful time, meditative time, in the Scriptures, for it is impossible to get rid of the trash in our minds without
replacing it with an entirely different way of thinking. Even kings and leaders, extraordinarily busy people, are told to make this their first priority (Deut. 17:18-20; Josh. 1:7-9) On the night he was betrayed, Jesus prayed for his followers in these terms: ‘Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth’ (John 17:17). There is no enduring sanctification apart from the truth of the gospel taking hold of your minds. The way we avoid being conformed to this world, the way we are transformed into conformity with Christ, is by the renewing of our minds (Rom. 12:2).

I know it is possible for people to gain a sort of mechanical knowledge of Scripture that is not characterized by repentance and faith and that therefore remains spiritually fruitless. But for most of us, that is not our current danger. Our current danger is that we make very little effort to think God’s thoughts after him, to hide his word in our heart that we might not sin against him (Ps. 119:11) To hide God’s word in our hearts—as opposed to our computers—means we ought to memorize it, read and reread it, think about it, turn it over in our minds. Only such committed absorption of what God says will enable us in turn to confront and change the unbiblical worldviews all around us, or as Paul puts it, to ‘demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God’ and to ‘take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ’ (2 Cor. 10:5).

In the passage before us, Paul puts things in the most concrete way. Think about true things, Paul insists, not about the false. Think about noble things, not the base. Think about whatever is right; do not dwell on the wrong. (What does this say about the programs you watch on television?) Think about whatever is pure, not the sleazy. Think about the lovely, not the disgusting. Think about the admirable, not the despicable. Whatever is excellent, think about it.

This is not some escapist demand to avoid the harsh realities of our fallen world. The sad fact is that many people dwell on dirt without grasping that it is dirt. The wise Christian will see plenty of dirt and will recognize it as dirt, precisely because everything that is clean has captured his or her mind. The hymn writer was right (one of those I learned as a child, and whose source escapes me):

*Guide my thoughts, keep them from straying*
*Into paths unwise for me,*
*Lest I should, thy love betraying,*
*Turn aside from Calvary.*

Or again:

*May the mind of Christ, my Savior,*
*Live in me from day to day,*
*By his love and power controlling*  
*All I do and say.*

- Kate Barclay Wilkinson,
Resolve to think holy thoughts.

Moreover, this verse (Phil. 4:8) is tightly tied to the next. After telling the Philippian believers to think holy thoughts, Paul goes on to say, ‘Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put into practice. And the God of peace will be with you’ (Phil. 4:9). In other words, Paul is returning to a theme that was very strong in the previous chapter: we are to emulate worthy Christian leaders. In this context, that theme is now applied to the discipline of the mind.

We are to emulate Christian leaders who have clearly disciplined their minds. Of course, we have no access to the mind and thoughts of another except through what that mind says and does. But that is the point. Paul is saying, in effect: What was on my mind when I was with you? What did I talk about? What did I read? What was the burden of my conversation? What did I value? What did I do to improve my mind? ‘Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put into practice. And the God of peace will be with you’ (Phil. 4:9).