

LEARNING AND LIVING

Philippians 4:8-9

INTRODUCTION

Illustration – Imagine you and I went into a Christian bookstore. We pulled all the books off the shelves. You have a pack of green highlighters and I have a pack of red highlighters. You highlight everything in the books that comes from the Bible. And I highlight everything that comes from the shifting sands, self-love, the psychological, and the trivial. I am afraid I would run out of ink in the entire pack of highlighters before you made a dent in your first highlighter.

The final two imperatives in the body of the letter.
Paul is closing his letter. → **READ Phil 4:8-9**

Proposition: 2 Calls from God →

- I. A Call to **Think**
- II. A Call to **Do**

So That: This is thought and action. This is, “love in Truth is love in deed.”

→ Most of our time will be spent on the **1st Call - v. 8**

The **1st Call** ...

- I. God Calls us to **Think**

Point – **Rom 12:1-2a** – “I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship. ^{2a}And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”

Point – The problem with most evangelicals is they don’t think. Instead, there is a reigning prevalence of feelings, emotion, experience, and pragmatism. “If it works for you, then it must be true.”

In a 1985 book entitled Right Thinking, the author says, “*What scares me is the anti-intellectual, anti-critical thinking philosophy that has spilled over into the church. This philosophy tends to romanticize the faith, [turning] the local church into an experience center. Their concept of church is they are spiritual consumers and the church’s job is to meet their felt needs,*”

The Word of God says:

Prov 23:7 – “as he thinks within himself, so he is.”

Luke 6:45 – “The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil *man* out of the evil *treasure* brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart.”

Proof – “**⁸Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things.**”

“**Finally, brethren,**” – **3:1. Illustration** – Remember the little boy who asked his father, “Daddy, what does the preacher mean when he says ‘finally’?” His father replied, “Not much really.”☺

Notice! → Paul does not say, “whatever is true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, and of good repute”

He says, “whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is ...”

He wants us to take time and consider each virtue.

Point – **8 Preoccupying Passions** upon which God commands you to meditate:

A. Veracity

B. Nobility

- C. Integrity
- D. Purity
- E. Beauty
- F. Admirability
- G. Quality
- H. Laudability

Preoccupying → Consuming, gripping, absorbing

Illustration– We are the sheep. A sheep grazes in a field.
→ These are the fields in which we must graze.

1st Preoccupying Passion upon which God commands you to Meditate ...

A. Veracity

Point – **Psa 119:142** – “Thy law is truth.” **Psa 119:160** – “The sum of Thy word is truth.” **John 17:17** – “Thy word is truth.”
→ **John 14:6** – “I am the way, and the truth, and the life.”
Proof – “**whatever is true**”

“**true**” – from the Greek word - ἀληθής

God defines Truth. God IS Truth. This goes against our postmodern world and thought that there is no truth, or that truth is whatever you define it to be.

Illustration– Beloved, in what fields are you grazing?
Are you paying attention to the fields?
Are you deliberately working these fields?
An unattended field will soon be overrun with weeds.

Application – A.W. Tozer said, “*The heart that fails to cultivate truth and root out error will shortly be a theological wilderness.*”

2nd Preoccupying Passion upon which God commands you to meditate ...

B. Nobility

Point – whatever is dignified, worthy of respect, → upright

Proof – our text says “**whatever is honorable**” – from the Greek word - σεμνός – of good character → sublime, majestic, or sacred

Prov. 8:6 – “Listen, for I shall speak noble things; and the opening of my lips *will produce* right things.”

1 Tim. 3:8 – “Deacons likewise *must be* men of dignity”,
Tit. 2:2 – “dignified”

Illustration – There is a sign on the Trans-Alaska Highway, “Choose your rut carefully. You’ll be in it for the next 200 miles.”

Application– This is the reality Paul is talking about today. Let your mind be preoccupied and dwell on these things.

3rd Preoccupying Passion upon which God commands you to meditate ...

C. Integrity

Point – Postmodernism says there is no real truth. The philosophy continues that knowledge is made up or invented and not discovered. And because knowledge is invented, you can’t know anything with certainty. All ideas and facts are “believed” instead of “known.” This is a problem.

The solution? The Word of God says:

Proof – “**whatever is right**”

“**right**” – δίκαιος – conforming to the standard, will, and character of God; righteous, good; just; fair, honest

Col 4:1 – “justice”

Gal 3:11 – “The righteous man shall live by faith.”

Rom 3:26 – “He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.”

→ Not “**right**” as defined by consensus, popular opinion, or a post-modern “whatever seems right to you.”
→ “**right**” as defined by God

Illustration – Judas didn’t do what was right. Stephen did.

Application – In the same way, we think and do what is right because God defines what is right.

God decrees what is right. And God declares what is right.

We may end up losing our job.

We may end up being burned alive. We think right and speak right and do right because it is non-negotiable.

4th Preoccupying Passion upon which God commands you to meditate ...

D. Purity

The list continues:

Proof – “**whatever is pure**”

“**pure**” – ἁγνός – without defect or stain, undefiled – comes from root a`gioj (which means ‘holy’) – describes ritual purity and moral integrity

Psa 12:6 – “The words of the LORD are pure words; as silver tried in a furnace on the earth, refined seven times.”

2 Cor 7:11 – defined as “innocent” in the New Testament

1 Tim 5:22 – “Keep yourself free from sin.”

Illustration – After a violent storm one night, a large tree, which over the years had become a stately giant, was found lying across the pathway in a park. Nothing but a splintered stump was left. The weakness of that tree was not brought on by the sudden storm. Closer examination showed that was

rotten at the core because thousands of tiny insects had eaten away at its heart over a long period of time. It began the very moment the first insect nested within its bark.

Application – In the same way, God here is commanding you and I to guard our heart and protect ourselves.

5th Preoccupying Passion upon which God commands you to meditate ...

E. Beauty

Point – **Illustration** – In Gen 41, the pharaoh had a dream of 7 “sleek and fat” cows and 7 “gaunt and ugly” cows. The Hebrew word translated as “ugly” is *ra*, which is the Heb word for evil.

Proof – “**whatever is lovely**”

“**lovely**” – προσφιλῆς – *hapax* – pleasing or admirable – The Greek word translated here literally means – “toward brotherly love”.

Illustration– A 19th century man named Charles William Eliot was born with an unsightly birthmark on his face. He was told as a young man that surgeons couldn’t remove it. This moment was “the dark hour of his soul.”

But Eliot’s mother gave him this advice: “My son, it is not possible for you to get rid of this hardship ... But ... it is possible, with God’s help, for you to grow a mind and soul so big that people will forget to look at your face.”

Charles William Eliot is not known in history because of his birthmark. He is known because he was president of Harvard from 1869-1909.

The Harvard website itself says this, “The presidency of Charles William Eliot played out on an epic scale like no other, from his record-setting 40 years in office to his transformation

of Harvard into a modern research university to his far-reaching impact on U.S. higher education.”

Application – Beloved, we do not see as the world sees. We do not look at the outward man. We do not consider beauty the way the world judges beauty.

6th Preoccupying Passion upon which God commands you to meditate ...

F. Admirability

Point – Praiseworthy.

Proof – “**whatever is of good repute**” – εὐφημος – *uttering sounds of good omen, abstaining from unprofitable words, keeping a holy silence.*

One man said – “the delicacy which guards the lips’

Illustration – One day, a ship captain recorded in the ship’s log, “First-mate drunk today.” This was the first incident where the mate had been drunk. He pleaded with the captain to amend the statement, but the captain refused.

→ The next time that the First-mate was in charge of the ship, he recorded in the log, “Captain sober today.” ☺

Application – first litmus test to anything we would consider or say is: Is it **True**? Second litmus test: Is it potentially misleading? Is it profitable? Is it well-timed?

God isn’t saying you can’t ever think about or do things that are not praiseworthy. He is saying, in fact He commands, for us to be preoccupied (absorbed, consumed, gripped by) things that are praiseworthy.

Application – Diplomacy. Sensitivity. Sympathy. Subtlety.

Following six adjectives are two general catch-all nouns:

G. Quality

Proof – “if there is any excellence” – ἀρετὴ –

6 “whatever is” and 2 “if any” drives home the point!

Hab. 3:3 – “His splendor covers the heavens, and the earth is full of His praise.”

2 Pet. 1:3 – “His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence.”

I like what the great statesman Booker T. Washington said:
“Excellence is to do a common thing in an uncommon way.”

Illustration – The name Stradivarius is synonymous with fine violins. Antonius Stradivarius insisted that no instrument constructed in his shop would be sold until it was as near perfection as human care and skill could make it.

→ His work philosophy was summed up: *“Other men will make other violins, but no man shall make a better one.”*

He said, *“God needs violins to send His music into the world, and if any violins are defective God’s music will be spoiled.”*

Application – Beloved, whatever we do, we need to do it, by God’s grace and mercy, with quality and excellence.

8th Preoccupying Passion upon which God commands you to meditate ...

H. Laudability

Point – Deserving praise. Commendable.

Proof – “and if anything worthy of praise” –

Eph. 1:6, 12, 14 – “to the praise of His glory” - used of God. In our text, if there is anything in God’s created world, meditate on these things.

“let your mind dwell on these things” – grammatically - present imperative - command – λογίζομαι – keeping a mental record *take into account, reckon to; have in mind, ponder, think (about), believe;*

Phil 3:13 – “Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet”

Application – This is where we are being tested. Where our minds gravitate when we have nothing to do. This may be the biggest indicator of where our treasure lies and who reigns in our lives.

Application – In the negative, this condemns the preoccupation with: 1) evil and 2) entertainment.

→ **Do NOT be Preoccupied with Evil ...**

Consider the mainstream media – whatever is untrue, unholy, unjust, impure, ugly, of ill repute, vicious, and blameworthy - seems to be the stock and trade.

Perhaps you feed on a diet of alternative media. That you believe to be less biased. Maybe you are right.

→ BUT If you become preoccupied with this, if this is what consumes your mind and thoughts, you are in sin.

You are in sin because your mind is not dwelling on “whatever is true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, and of good repute.”

Your mind is dwelling on the lunacy of the left and the downfall of the Western world.

→ **Do NOT be Preoccupied with Entertainment ...**

Application – Beloved, if you were to evaluate your down time, what you do with your spare time, maybe the best question to ask is

1) How much down time, spare time do you have? If there is an overabundance, maybe it is time to recalibrate.

2) When evaluating your down time/spare time, if someone were to question your activities, would the majority of your answers start with, “What’s wrong with it?”

God commands, ask instead, “What’s right with it?”

24 hours a day, 7 days a week, you are being bombarded with the trivial and with the crude on your smart phone.

→ If you do not deliberately plan to think on what is true and commendable, it’s not going to come knocking to your door.

God Calls us to **Think**, ...

The 2nd Call ...

II. God Calls us to **Do**

Point – **MacArthur** – *“For our sake and the sake of the watching world who is assessing the validity of our message by how it works in our lives, we need to be spiritually strong. We are called to strength. We are called to stability. We are called to be unwavering. We are called to be immovable. We are called to be soldiers who, having done all, stand that we may be blessed, that we may know joy, and that the world may see the power of our God in our lives.”*

Maybe a simpler way to capture this → The issue is NOT ...
What we think we are. The issue IS ... As we think, we are.

Two pairs of related words → Declared and Demonstrated.
This is teaching pondered and practiced. → This is learning and living.

Proof – “⁹**The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things; and the God of peace shall be with you.**”

“The things you have learned and received” – from the Greek word μαθητῶν – same root that is translated as “disciple” (a learner)

“and heard and seen in me” – Paul exemplified – **3:17** - he was not pumping himself up by saying ‘join in following my example’ → Precept and Practice → Exhortation and Imitation

- as God has worked in his heart, so God will work in yours

“practice these things!” – present imperative → keep putting into practice - that is standing duty; habitual

Hendriksen – “True believers *hear*. They meditate until they *understand*. Then they *act* upon it, putting it into *constant practice*, thereby showing their house was built upon a rock.”

“these things” – 4:8 and 4:9 → Think and Do!

This phrase is peppered throughout the New Testament:

1 Tim 1:6; 3:14; 4:6, 11, 15-16; 5:7; 2 Tim 2:14; Tit 2:15; 3:8
1 John 1:4; 2:1, 26; 5:13

Promise:

“and the God of peace shall be with you” – 1:2; 4:7

God’s presence in **Old Testament** to help and protect His children: Gen 21:22; 26:3; Exod 3:12; Josh 1:5; Job 29:5; Psa 23:4; 46:7

Favorite description of God at end of **New Testament** letters:
Rom 15:33; 16:20; 1 Cor 13:11; Phil 4:9; 1 Thess 5:23; Heb 13:20

Illustration – Here is the problem you and I face, and especially you young men and women

1300’s: I’m dying from the Black Plague.

1800's: I'm 9 and working in a factory.
1900's: I'm leaving country to fight in a war.
2000's: I'm bored and offended.

Illustration – Beloved, we do not want San Tan Bible Church to become a library of musty, dusty, rusty old volumes of Truth just sitting on the shelf. Then, when someone takes the book off the shelf and a cloud of dust assaults their nostrils.

Application – We want to be like the Apostle Paul! A living example of these 8 objects of mediation; consuming passions.

CONCLUSION