

Thinking Well Leads to Living Well!

Text: Philippians 4:4-20

One of the most quoted phrases in the Bible is found in Proverbs 23:7: "For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he...." This is God telling us the power of our thoughts. What and how we think changes everything. The American essayist, Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "A man is what he thinks about all day long." Two weeks ago tomorrow through the convenience of technology, I said good-bye to our young people after they boarded the bus to camp. It was a joy to welcome them home again. After five days, some of the kids arrived in a completely different attitude. In a short period of time, their thinking has been adjusted and most of them are ready to serve the Lord with a new vigor. James Allen said, "Every action and feeling is preceded by a thought."

The Bible gives us categories in which to direct our thoughts: "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things" (Philippians 4:8). You'll not find a better, more positive list of things to think about than these. Let's examine more closely what God wants us to think about:

I. WHATSOEVER THINGS ARE TRUE,

The word for "true" is the Greek word *alethes* meaning that which is not concealing. God is saying don't live in "cover up." The Watergate scandal brought about the only time a sitting president was forced to step down from office. It was caused by something that of itself would not have had this effect. A small group of men broke into the Watergate building attempting to spy on the Democratic headquarters. If President Nixon had reported his findings to authorities, he could have been exonerated and perhaps have gone down in history as one of the finest presidents in the 20th Century. Living truthfully is respected even by people who do not practice it themselves. Truth is a freeing element. Jesus said, "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32).

II. WHATSOEVER THINGS ARE HONEST,

"Honest" is from the Greek word *semnos* which means venerable, i.e. honorable. It has been said a venerable person is one who is "heroic in virtue." Oh that we might have heroes of virtue today! One day a person was propositioned to do something evil for one million dollars. The person propositioned said they would have to think about it. About two hours later, the one who presented the proposition asked if they would consider doing the dark deed for ten dollars. The insulted party replied, "Ten dollars? What do you take me for?" The inquirer responded, "We have already determined what you are; we are just trying to negotiate a price." An honest person, one who is "heroic in virtue," is not for sale, not now, not ever! The tale-tale sign of the person who is

not venerable is one who thinks about and seriously considers doing wrong. An honest person dismisses the bad thoughts from their mind.

This should stir us to discover, read, meditate and think on people who lived lives of honesty. Robert E. Lee really believed he was blood kin to some of the most respected royalty of old England. One of his biographers said it was never proven, but he thought he was of kin and therefore lived a life of *noblesse oblige*, which is a French phrase literally meaning "the obligation of nobility." The Oxford English Dictionary says that the term "suggests noble ancestry constrains to honorable behavior; privilege entails to responsibility."

I would be remiss if I did not take the opportunity to say, let us look to Jesus, the only perfectly honest One who ever lived, and follow His steps. If we therefore consider ourselves not just members of a sect, but part of the family of God, our behavior would reflect the nobility of character found in our Savior.

III. WHATSOEVER THINGS ARE JUST,

The word "just" comes to us from *dikaios* meaning equitable in character or act; innocent, holy, meet, righteous. This is a person who thinks impartially and is free of bias. His or her response to every situation is not what is expedient, but what is right. God is saying, let your mind be so holy that you can be trusted to make the right decision. This is a person who takes the right path, even if it takes longer. Don't let situational ethics cloud your thinking. Situational ethics is doing the wrong things in an attempt to get the right results. As Christians, we do not have permission to do wrong in order to get a chance to do right.

IV. WHATSOEVER THINGS ARE PURE,

Pure comes to us from the word *hagnos* which means clean, modest or chaste. Job said, "I made a covenant with mine eyes; why then should I think upon a maid?" (Job 31:1). This righteous man realized that allowing his mind to gravitate toward unwholesome thoughts would eventually pollute him. Therefore, he made a promise between himself and God that he would not allow this mental pollution to take place.

Years ago Vance Havner was in Los Angeles. He was watching the weather report and heard the weatherman say, "The pollution in Los Angeles is so bad that it is going to take a wind from elsewhere to remove it." He made this application to the church and said, "It is going to take that heavenly wind from elsewhere, the power of Pentecost to remove the pollution that has hit the church." On a more personal level, you don't have to wait for revival to come to the church; you may experience it in your own life if you think on whatsoever things are pure.

V. WHATSOEVER THINGS ARE LOVELY,

Lovely originates from the word *prospiles* meaning "friendly towards." Let's face it, a lot of people are just not friendly. What a boon of blessing comes our way if we make a bold attempt to be friendly. To become friendly, you have to think friendly. This cannot be faked. It is easily spotted as insincere or disingenuous when you don't mean it.

The Bible says, “A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother” (Proverbs 18:24). I believe the latter part of this verse is an indirect reference to the Lord Jesus Christ as that greatest of all friends. To think friendly, we must learn to love people. This may be difficult for some; that’s why the Lord commands us to “think” like this. Do it on purpose. When Jesus saw people, He set His love on them, not because they deserve it, but because He made the deliberate intention to do so.

VI. WHATSOEVER THINGS ARE OF GOOD REPORT;

The Greek word for “good report” is *euphemos* which means well spoken of and that which is reputable. The Bible says, “Speak not evil one of another, brethren...” (James 4:11). When we voice an evil report, our heart becomes darkened with unhealthy thoughts. Even if the person of whom you speak has committed every filthy, evil thing of which you speak, you are allowing your mind to get in the gutter with them. God says, “...Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts...” (James 4:8). Dwelling on evil is not spiritually healthy. The Word of God says, “For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret” (Ephesians 5:12). If we must speak of these things, make it a prayer request without the sordid details. Be cautious not to turn a prayer request into a gossip session.

VII. PLANT THE SEED OF GOOD THOUGHTS AND ALLOW THEM TO GROW.

As we round up our thinking process listen to God’s Word: “...if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things” (Philippians 4:8). We don’t have to wait until we have perfected the right thinking to start thinking rightly. Look for the good wherever you can find it and it doesn’t have to be superfluous, because the Lord said, “if there be any virtue and if there be any praise...” If there is anything praiseworthy, let your mind go there.

Dr. Bob Jones Sr. said, “Behind every human tragedy, there is a slow process of wicked evil thinking.” Let me reverse this: “Behind every godly success is a slow process of righteous and lovely thinking.” Find the good, think about the good, plant it in your mind and let it grow!

-Pastor Pope-