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## Thoughts and Actions

### Philippians 4:6-9

**Intro:** In this last chapter of Paul's letter to the Philippians, he is making practical application of all the doctrine he's written about from the very start. He began in **ch1** by exhorting them to be of the same mind, to be unified in heart and in purpose. He then instructed them to put on the mind of Christ in **ch2**; which is a call to be humble with each other and be submissive to the Lord's will. In **ch3** he encouraged them to have an eternal outlook on life, to see things from a spiritual point of view and not just the physical. Now, in **ch4**, Paul explains what all of this should look like in their lives. He encourages unity in **vs1-3**, constant rejoicing in **v4** and being reasonable with others in **v5**.

As we saw last week, **vs6** is actually a command and not just a suggestion. The command is to not worry but to pray.

Again, this is not so much a formula for living without worry as it is an instruction on how to have peace, how to have the peace of God reign in your life and the first step in that direction is to engage in proper prayer. This begins with coming to God on the basis of Christ's sacrifice on the cross – you must be born again. But even then, you must also be careful to approach God with a clean heart – confessing and repenting of sin. It's from this position of trust and obedience that we are invited to bring all of our doubts and worries or petitions and requests before the throne of God and since He's doing the inviting, we know that our prayers will be heard by God and He will respond to them.

Of course, having a vibrant, consistent prayer life is not always an easy thing to accomplish in this busy world we live in, at least that's what a lot of Christians believe. We can assume they believe this because God's peace doesn't seem to reign in their lives much. But, that's only because peace doesn't just involve the heart – it also involves the mind. In fact, the fiercest battles believers are engaged in take place solely in the mind. Experiencing God's peace in your life not only results from right praying but, in an even greater sense, it's the result of right thinking! What we know about God, believe about God and think about God all contributes to the level of peace in our lives (**Isa 26:3**).

Much of the Christian life comes down to the mind. [Rom 12:2](#) speaks of being transformed by the renewing of your mind and [2 Cor 10:5](#) speaks of the importance of casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. Obviously, what we choose to meditate on, what we choose to fill our minds with matters. Wrong thinking leads to wrong feeling and before you know it, the heart and mind are pulled in different directions and we are strangled by worry. Thoughts are real and powerful even though they can't be seen, weighed or measured. In our text, Paul lays out for us just how we are to bring every thought into captivity by sharing with us the details of what Christians should be thinking about.

**8** – Paul is presenting here what he would call both the food and the fruit of the mind that is guarded by the peace of God. When we deliberately put these good things into our minds and meditate on them regularly, then they will stay in our minds and they will be manifested in our speech and actions. The list provided here translates very well from the Greek to English but these attributes have largely disappeared in our modern culture and vernacular so we could stand just a little elaboration.

true – In 2006, Dr. Walter Cavert did a study of the things we worry about. He discovered that 40% of the things we worry about never happen; 30% of our worries concern the past; 12% are needless worries about our health; 10% are insignificant or petty. Only 8% of worries are over legitimate matters of concern. 92% of worries are either imaginary, never happened or involve things we have no control of anyway.

Satan is a thief and a liar and he wants to steal our joy in Christ by corrupting our minds with his lies. He tripped up Eve in the garden with the seemingly innocent question, “hath God said?” Or, did God really say that and that's exactly how he approaches us today. He gets us to question God's word and then provides a more comfortable lie to replace it with. The Holy Spirit controls our minds through truth ([Jn 17:17](#)) but Satan tries to control them with needless worries brought on by his lies. Whenever we choose to believe a lie, we give place to the devil to wreak havoc in our lives.

noble...just – These words relate to things that are worthy of respect and

right. There are plenty of things in society that are not respectable: attitudes, lifestyles, motivations. Christians are not to dwell on these things or aspire to them. That's not to say we should just stick our heads in the sand and ignore what's happening in the world around us but it does mean we shouldn't focus our attention on dishonorable things and allow them to control our thoughts.

It's a real shame but in large part, a lot of the people in our culture who should garner the most respect have too often rendered themselves unrespectable by the atrocious things they support and promote or the good and positive things they disparage and condemn. Even in this, while it may be disheartening to hear, we must not allow the bad choices of people in the public eye, people who the media like to uphold as role models and paragons of virtue, we shouldn't allow our minds to be dragged down by misguided agreement or unwarranted condemnation. Yes, they are stubborn in their rebellion against God and His Word, but so were we once. These people need our prayers more than they need our criticism. Our prayers are the only thing that will actually help them come out of their rebellion.

pure – this likely refers to moral purity since people back then were constantly bombarded with temptations to sexual impurity, much like today. I'd say it's even worse today because in Paul's day, you had to go out to the pagan temple or brothels to entertain impure sexual proclivities. Now it comes right into the home through the cable or internet. In fact, illicit sexual activity has become so common place, so much of the status quo in our culture that it's rarely ever referenced in most churches today, let alone preached against or discouraged. But that hasn't changed how God thinks about the subject. Sexual purity is as much God's will for His children today as it was back then (**Ps 101:3**)

James Dobson – you don't need to take the lip off the septic tank to know what's down in there...

lovely...good report – lovely means beautiful, attractive while good report refers to things that are worth talking about, things that are appealing. The Christian must major on the high and noble thoughts, not the base thoughts of this fallen, corrupt world.

virtue...praise – If it has virtue, it will motivate us to do better. If it has praise, it will be worth recommending to others. No Christian can afford to waste

precious mind power on things that tear them down spiritually or things that would tear others down if they were shared. Again, that's not to say we can't talk about the evil that exists and flourishes in our society but we should discuss it in light of scripture and God's ability to overcome evil with good. To look around us and see the mess this world is in without a solid grasp of scripture will lead a person to unimaginable worry to the point of being distraught and hopeless. But, knowing God by knowing His word provides comfort to our minds and peace to our hearts. Seeing the world from the perspective of scripture brings both peace and hope.

Not only do these things promote right thinking in the Christian mind, which leads to peace, but they also provide a workable standard in the area of doubtful things that eventually appear in every believer's life. If you've been a Christian for any length of time, you've already experienced some important issues in life that the Bible doesn't deal with specifically or provide any explicit details. These issues may concern whether a Christian should drink alcohol or not or should they enter politics. Should Christians fight in war, work for companies that build weapons, make alcoholic drinks or sell them? To what extent should a believer adopt the standards of their culture and society? These are just a few of the myriad questions believers face in this country and around the world. What are we to do when the Bible is not clear on these issues?

Well, even though the Bible is not completely clear on these issues, it's also not completely silent on them either. Scripture provides 3 principles that will help any Christian deal with 99% of their moral dilemmas. The first is found in [Rom 6:14](#). This teaches that whatever the answer may be to the problem of moral dilemmas, it's never legalism! The answer will never be found by organizing a body of Christians to decide whether some activity is proper or not. Legalism has always been adopted by groups or even individuals as a means to keep the people in line – to keep them from engaging in sin. While that may seem logical, it's actually counter-productive. Legalism never promotes holiness, peace or happiness in the believer's life. On the other hand, living by grace actually leads to holiness because God's grace never makes us rebels; it makes us believers who love God and desire to please Him.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> principle is found in [I Corinthians](#). Although all things are lawful for Christians—because we're not under law but under grace—all things are

not expedient. That's true for 2 reasons: First, the thing itself may gain a harmful control over us or have a harmful effect on us physically. Second, through us it may hurt other Christians.

(6:12) Paul knew that God hadn't set him free from sin and the law just so that he could become captive to things.

The guiding principle here is whether you as a Christian are using things or whether things are using you. Nothing can be as obviously good for a person as food as it's necessary for strong bodies and mental health. Still, it's possible for someone to become so addicted to overeating that the good end is thwarted and the person's health is endangered. Another example is sex. This is also a gift from God and when it occurs within the bonds of marriage it's a force for strength in the home and an expression of close union. But it can also be destructive. It can control the person instead of the person controlling it, and as such, it can destroy the very values it was created to maintain. The Bible teaches that the Christian must never use things—food, sex, drugs, alcohol, possessions, careers, etc.—in such a way that they actually fall under their power. This is an unequivocal warning to avoid misusing them.

Later on in (10:23), Paul gives another reason why something may not be expedient: the freedom of one believer may hurt the spiritual growth of another. The verses that follow show he's thinking of the edification and growth of fellow Christians. Now, this verse doesn't mean you have to take your standards of conduct entirely from what other Christians say or think. If you try to do that, you're either going to become hypocritical, schizophrenic, or angry. It also doesn't mean you should allow the prejudices and viewpoints of others to dictate your behavior. Yet the verse does mean something. It says there are situations in which we must avoid certain things, even if they are right in themselves, because they may be detrimental to other believers.

Our text provides the 3<sup>rd</sup> principle to assist in directing our conduct in the area of doubtful things is actually the clearest and most helpful. According to vs8, we're to decide between doubtful things by choosing what is best! This doesn't necessarily exclude the best things in our society, even if they are not explicitly Christian. How can that be? The meat of v8 lies in that fact that the virtues mentioned here are actually pagan virtues. These words don't appear in any of the great lists of Christian virtues (like love, joy, peace,

etc.). Mostly, they're borrowed from Greek ethics and the writings of the Greek philosophers. By using them, Paul's actually sanctifying the generally accepted virtues of pagan morality. He's saying that although the pursuit of the best things by Christians will always mean pursuing fellowship with God, the will of God, advancing the gospel, and other spiritual things, it will not mean excluding the best values that the world has to offer.

There are still some good and wholesome things to be found out in the world and the things that are acknowledged to be honorable by the best people everywhere are also worthy to be cultivated by Christians. Thus, Christians can love all that is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, and admirable, wherever they find it. They can rejoice in the best of art and good literature. They can thrill to great music. They can thrive on beautiful architecture. They should do these things and they can thank God for giving us the ability even in our fallen state to create such things of beauty.

**9** – To experience the peace of God, Paul exhorts us to right praying and right thinking but the final step is also the most difficult – right living. You can't separate outward actions from inward attitudes. Sin will always result in unrest and purity should result in peace ([Isa 32:17](#)). Right living is a necessary condition for experiencing the peace of God.

Paul balances 4 different activities here: learned and received, heard and saw. It's one thing to learn a truth, but quite another thing to receive that truth inwardly and allow it to become part of your inner self, your thought process. Facts in the head are not enough; we must also have biblical truths in our hearts. In Paul's ministry, he not only taught the Word but he also lived it so that his listeners could see the truth demonstrated in and through his life. Paul's lifestyle should be ours as well. We must learn the Word, receive it, hear it and then make sure we do it.

Finally, Paul provides a wonderful promise to those who endeavour to pursue the things he is commanding in this passage: right praying, right thinking and right living. Not only will they experience the very peace of God in their lives but they will also experience the presence of the God of peace as well. If we are walking with the Lord, faithfully and obediently pursuing His will for our lives, then both the peace of God and the God of peace will exercise their influence over our lives with great effect ([Col 3:15](#)). Paul says that the peace of God will act as an umpire in our hearts. If we stray from

His will, if we disobey His Word, we lose that peace and we know we've done something wrong. God's peace is the umpire that calls us "out!"

These principles for experiencing the peace of God, this formula for having the secure mind; it may seem simple and even trite. It may even seem so trite that it could easily be set aside or ignored. That's never a good response to biblical teaching and yet, sadly, there are too many churches where God's peace is not the overriding experience. Why is this? The answer is clearly seen when we contrast **Phil 4** with **James 4**. If **Phil 4** is called the chapter of peace then **James 4** is the chapter of war. It begins with the question: "Where do wars and fights come from among you?"

James goes on to explain the causes of war in the church: 1) wrong praying (**v3** – you ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures); 2) wrong thinking (**v8** – purify your hearts, you double-minded); 3) wrong living (**v4** – do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?). There is no middle ground in the spiritual battle that is the Christian life. Either we yield our hearts and minds to the Spirit of God and we practice right praying, thinking and living or we yield to the flesh and find ourselves torn apart by worry and conflict.

With the peace of God to guard us and the God of peace to guide us, why would any believer choose to be on the losing side of the battle? 😊