

# Living as Citizens of Heaven – Part 12

## Biblical Thinking and Right Living – Phil. 4:8-9

Crosspoint – Dave Spooner – Aug. 18<sup>th</sup>, 2024

### Intro:

- Here is the sermon in a sentence. **What you focus on and who you follow shape who you are, guide what you do, and determine who is with you.** This is what is contained in our passage for this morning as Paul gives us his final instructions in the book of Philippians.
- We are going to read our passage for today in its entirety, and then we will circle back and examine each part. Please open your Bibles to Philippians chapter four, and we will be reading verses eight and nine. I am reading from the NIV version, and if you have a different version, it should be similar to what is on the screens. If you don't have a Bible with you, there should be one in front of you in the pew; we will be on page 1013 in that Bible. Here is the passage:

### Phil 4:8-9 NIV

**Finally, brothers and sisters, 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. 9 Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.**

### The power of your thoughts

- Paul begins with the word "finally," indicating that this teaching is a culmination of his previous instructions. He understands the power of our thoughts—how they shape our attitudes, our actions, and, ultimately, our lives.
- What we think about shapes who we are. Proverbs 23:7 reminds us, **“For as he thinks within himself, so he is”** (HCSB). The thoughts that are planted in the soil of our soul by you or by others, if focused on through feeding and watering, will grow roots of belief and will spring into life and be seen in our words, emotions, and actions.
- So, we must be super vigilant about what thoughts are planted in the soil of our soul. If you like what you see coming out of your life, continue to feed, water, and take care of those things. If the garden of your soul is pushing up things that are ugly, unfruitful, and poisonous, you have to weed these things out, not by just cutting down the plant, but by digging out the roots and then replanting something else. This is the hard work of tending the garden of your soul.
- Paul then gives us a list of “seeds” that should be planted in the soil of our soul. These are the thoughts that we should focus on and give ground to in our lives. Everything else should be rejected and pulled up. These things will produce the fruit of the Spirit, the beauty and qualities that you want coming from your life: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal 5:22-23 ESV). He lists qualities that should characterize our mental focus: truth, nobility, righteousness, purity, loveliness, admirability, excellence, and praiseworthiness.

### The power of your focus

- Paul gives us a clear guideline on what to focus on. This is not a suggestion. We are commanded to think about these things and plant them in the soil of our souls.

## Phil 4:8 NIV

**Finally, brothers and sisters, 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.**

- Let's break down these characteristics:
- **Whatever is True:** We live in a world filled with half-truths and deceit. But Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life" (John 14:6). Our thoughts should align with the truth found in God's Word.
- **Whatever is Noble and Right:** Nobility and righteousness reflect the character of God. Thinking about what is noble and right helps us to aspire to live in a way that honors God and others.
- **Whatever is Pure:** Purity is not just about avoiding sin but actively pursuing holiness. It is setting our minds on things that are clean and untainted by the world's corruption.
- **Whatever is Lovely and Admirable:** These qualities speak to the beauty and goodness in the world. When we focus on what is lovely and admirable, we find joy and gratitude even in difficult circumstances.
- **If Anything is Excellent or Praiseworthy:** Excellence and praiseworthiness are the pinnacle of what we should aim for in our thoughts. These are things that reflect the glory of God and inspire worship.
- What you focus on is what you see. Here is an example of this. Have you ever noticed, when you get a different vehicle, that all of a sudden, you see that vehicle everywhere? Why is that? It is because what you focus on is what you see.
- Also, what you are looking for is what you will find. I often tell this to students who are going off to college. If they are looking to get into trouble or a party scene, etc., they will find it. But if they are looking for godly friends and good things, they will find it as well. No matter where they go to school. Some places are easier to find these things than others, but eventually, they will find what they are looking for. So, look for the right things.

*There's a story about a man who moved to a small village. On his first day, he met an elder and asked, "What are the people like in this village?" The elder responded, "What were the people like in the place you came from?" The man replied, "Oh, they were selfish, rude, and unfriendly." The elder nodded and said, "You'll find the people here are the same.*

*Later that day, another newcomer asked the elder the same question. When the elder inquired about the people in the previous town, this person replied, "They were kind, generous, and welcoming." The elder smiled and said, "You'll find the people here are the same.*

***The moral is that what we focus on often determines our experience. If we focus on what is good, true, and admirable, we will begin to see those qualities around us and in others, just as Philippians 4:8-9 instructs us to do.***

- Doing this will transform your relationships, including your marriage, your family, your workplace, wherever you are, and whoever you meet. And more importantly, you will be transformed, for we are transformed by the renewal of our minds (Rom. 12:2).
- After addressing how we are to focus our thoughts, Paul tells us then to focus on Godly examples and follow them.

## **Phil 4:9a NIV**

**Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice.**

### **The power of your examples**

- We all need good, godly examples to follow. This is where truth comes to life. Having bad examples can be helpful in knowing what not to do, but it is much better if we have people in our lives that we can follow in a positive way. Earlier in this letter to the Philippians, Paul tells them, “Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do” (Phil 3:17). He also tells the church at Corinth that same thing by saying “Follow my example as I follow the example of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1).
- Having godly examples to follow is one of the foundational reasons we are to be in relationships in the church. We don’t want a church just filled with old people and we don’t want a church just filled with young people. We need both ends of the spectrum and everyone in between. We need each other. We need to learn from our examples, receive things from them, and listen to them. We all need to take the initiative to connect with each other in relationships. Don’t wait for someone to come up to you. Reach out, ask to get together, and invest in the lives of others. You have way more to give than you think you do, and you also can grow further than you think you can.
- We need to see godly people in action and then follow their examples. We need to think about what Paul tells us in this passage and then we need to learn from godly examples. And then we must put these things into practice in our own lives.

### **The power of your practice**

- I love the word “practice” because this is where we get better. This is a safe place to make mistakes, get up and try again. You have probably heard the phrase, “Practice makes perfect,” which it can do. But what I know for sure is that “practice makes permanent.” The more we do something, the more permanent it becomes. By default, we will return to what we practice. This is where you will see the fruit of the work you are doing with your thoughts and focusing on godly examples. This will transform your life and your living.
- This is true for any skill you want to learn; it takes practice and training. We know this is true about our physical abilities, and this is also true about our spiritual character. We can and must “train ourselves to be godly” (1 Tim. 4:7), and this is how we do it, in our thinking and in following godly examples and putting what we learn into practice. Godliness does not happen on its own, and no one stumbles into being godly. We have to intentionally work at growing in this way.
- In recent days, I have been describing our church as a greenhouse where we grow people in Christ. This is what we are striving to do. May this be an exceptional place for each of us to grow into the image of Christ, and may we help each other to do so and create an environment for maximum growth.

## **Phil 4:9b NIV**

**And the God of peace will be with you.**

### **The promise of God's presence**

- Paul concludes with a powerful promise: “And the God of peace will be with you.” When we align our thoughts with God’s Word and put it into practice, we experience the peace that only God can give. Notice that the wording is a little different than the previous passage, where we are told not to be “anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Phil 4:6-7). If we do this, God's peace will be *in you*.
- Now, doing what Paul instructs us in that verse is different from what he tells us to do in our passage today. If we think about what Paul teaches us to focus on, and if we put into practice what we have learned, received, heard, and seen in godly people, the God of peace will be with us.
- *If you do these things, God's peace will be in you, and God's presence will be with you.* This peace is not dependent on external circumstances but comes from the presence of God in our lives. It is a powerful peace that gives us internal peace, and we can bring the God of peace into the external situations and storms in life. This is powerful indeed.

### **Conclusion**

- As we reflect on Philippians 4:8-9, let us commit to cultivating a godly mindset. Let us be diligent in what we allow into our minds, focusing on what is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, and praiseworthy. Choose to focus on these things and your experiences, and you will change. Seek, learn, and follow godly examples, and let these things lead us into action—living out the truths we hold dear. In doing so, we will not only experience the peace of God but also be a source of peace and blessing to those around us.
- Remember that what you focus on and who you follow shape who you are, guide what you do, and determine who is with you. May the God of peace be with us all as we strive to live in a way that honors Him.

### **Benediction**

*Now, may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul, and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; He will surely do it (I Thess. 5:23-24).*

### **Questions for Growth Groups**

- When you reflect on your daily thoughts, which of these qualities (true, noble, right, etc.) do you find yourself naturally focusing on? Which ones might you struggle with?
- What practical steps can you take to shift your thoughts toward what is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, and praiseworthy in your daily life?
- Paul talks about putting into practice what we've learned, received, and seen. Can you share about a person who has impacted your life and how they have done so?
- In verse 9, Paul emphasizes practicing what we have learned. What are some ways you can "put into practice" what you have learned from this passage in your home, workplace, or community?
- How can thinking about these virtues change the way you respond to challenges or difficult situations?