

Philippians 4:8-9

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/phil/phil-4/philippians-48-9/>

Paul provides a list of what believers should keep our minds focused on: whatever is in line with God's design, whatever is clean and unspoiled from the world's influence, whatever God-honoring input will help keep our thoughts on the right track, and aid us in walking after Christ and Paul's example.

Paul said *finally* in 3:1, now he says *finally* again, stating *finally 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, dwell on these things.* The word translated *dwell* is “logizomai” from which we get our English word “logic.” It can be translated “think,” “reason,” or “reckon.” The theme of Philippians is to choose a mindset (“phroneo”) that is true and real. A mindset rooted in the reality of God, and His creation. The way to gain such a mindset is to think. To dwell. To reason. Not just to reason on anything, but to reason about the right things, beginning with things that are *true*.

The Governor Pilate reluctantly sentenced Jesus to death, having chosen political expediency over truth. When he interrogated Jesus, Jesus stated “I have come into the world to testify to the truth.” The cynical Roman politician retorted “What is truth?” (John 18:37-38). His reply was likely given as sarcasm, stating “There is no such thing as truth.” Roman politicians manipulated truth for their own end. The emperors claimed to be god, and likely did not believe there was any such thing as a god. And, in fact, left to human reason, truth is illusive and unobtainable. Since we are finite, there is no way to come to a full grasp of infinite reality. The book of Ecclesiastes makes it clear that if we rely on human experience and reason, it will lead to madness and folly.

But Jesus came to testify to the truth. And the truth is housed in the character and person of Jesus, who is the embodiment of God. That is why Paul admonishes us to choose the same mindset that Jesus chose. In doing so, we are dwelling on *whatever is true*.

It is also true that all of creation reflects the truth of God (Psalm 19, Romans 1:20). So when we reflect upon creation, with a mindset that it reflects its creator, we are also dwelling upon *whatever is true*. All things that *are true* will reflect Christ, the creator and sustainer of all that is. Anything that is false does not reflect Christ as creator and sustainer of all that is, it will be a perversion or twisting of what is good. So dwelling on those things is not beneficial, as it does not lead to choosing a mindset that is true, a mindset that will lead us to seek our own true self-interest.

It should be clear by now the immense importance we have been granted to exercise good stewardship of our choices. We can only choose three things. One of those three things we can control is our mindset (“phroneo”). Paul has admonished us throughout this letter to choose a mindset that is true. This appears to be an important component of choosing to trust God in all things. Choosing who or what to trust is another of the three things we control. And each of these things integrates with the third thing we control, which is what we do, what actions to take.

One action Paul admonishes us to take is to *dwell on* the right things. First he wants us to *dwell on whatever is true* . But also Paul wants us to *dwell upon whatever is honorable* . We should dwell on things that are worth rewarding. Paul has given us a clear example of what is worth being rewarded. He told us in Chapter 2 that Jesus was rewarded with the reward above all rewards for choosing to set aside comfort and take on a mantle of radical obedience. He was in heaven, enjoying being God, but took on human form, and overcame temptation and obedience, even to death on the cross, in radical obedience to His Father. This is what is worth being honored. It is the path Paul took, to seek the “prize of the upward call” (Philippians 3:14).

Further, Paul admonishes us to *dwell upon whatever is right* . The word translated *right* is the Greek word “ *dikaios* ” which appears over eighty times in the New Testament. Most of the time it is translated “righteous” or “just.” It means for something to line up with a standard. A “left justified” margin lines up properly with the assigned columnar spacing. Justice, or righteousness, is a primary theme of scripture, and the righteousness urged by God is to line up with His standard.

The standard God admonishes humans to take throughout the Bible is to live in a self-governing manner, seeking mutual welfare, and hope for the welfare of others as much as we hope for our own. God granted to Adam and Eve to tend the earth in self-governing harmony with one another, with creation, and with Him. The one thing He asked them not to do was to seek knowledge apart from Him. When they chose their own way, unrighteousness entered the world. The earth then filled with violence (Genesis 6:11) so God destroyed it and started anew with Noah and his family. He instituted human government to deter violence (Genesis 9) and eventually founded Israel as a priestly nation, to demonstrate to the earth the great benefits of living in a self-governing manner. God gave Israel the Ten Commandments, along with supporting regulations, to guide the Israelites to self-governance. The Ten Commandments were rooted in two major things:

1. Acknowledging that God is the supreme ruler, and His ways are the best ways. Submitting to His authority (the first five commandments).
2. Doing what God wanted them to do, which is summed up with the command to “love your neighbor as yourself” (the last five commandments).

Paul just provided a tangible example of what self-governance looks like in the instance of the two disputing women. He urged each person in the body to take responsibility to do what they could to advance the welfare of these ladies. They were to be assertively cooperative. They were not to seek comfort or control, but mutual benefit. The goal was for the ladies to have the same mindset. This is the essence of righteousness, for all members of a body to work together in unity. Paul uses the example of a body as an illustration of righteousness in Romans 12 as well as in 1 Corinthians 12. He makes it clear that the body only functions properly if it has the correct head. The correct head can only be Jesus Christ.

When we *dwell on whatever is right* , or just, or righteous, we should be dwelling on how our gifts are best applied to benefit others. We should be dwelling on the example of Jesus, the Head of the Body of Christ, and how we can follow in radical obedience in serving others. We should

be dwelling on what responsibility we can take to act, recognizing that we cannot control most aspects of life, and leaving the results to God.

We are also told to *dwell on whatever is pure*. Paul uses the word translated *pure* in other passages as remaining unsoiled by the filth of sin and of the ways of the world. To *dwell* upon what is *pure* would necessarily require that we do not immerse ourselves in any activity filled with the mindset of the world. We should think of ingesting the world's mindset as we would consider drinking poison. We don't want to fill our minds with impure, sinful, lustful thoughts, just as we don't want to poison ourselves. We should therefore take extreme care what printed or visual media we consume. We should take care who we listen to or spend time with. All these inputs affect what we *dwell* upon.

Paul additionally tells us to *dwell upon whatever is lovely*. The word translated *lovely* means acceptable or pleasing. To fit in the context, this would have to apply to things that align with that which pleases God. The overarching theme of Philippians is to choose the mindset of radical obedience Jesus chose, in order to please God as Jesus pleased God.

The next thing Paul tells us to dwell upon is *whatever is of good repute*. This is sometimes translated "commendable" or "of good report" or "admirable." Paul could have in mind to dwell upon "what is worthwhile." To dwell on things that help us choose a mindset to walk as Jesus walked, it makes sense to spend time and resources thinking about things that cause us to walk as Jesus walked. To do the things Jesus did. This might be the same idea as something that is of *excellence* and *worthy of praise*. The idea seems to be "spend your time thinking about things that help you choose a mindset that is true, and beneficial, then put that mindset into practical application."

Paul now adds another admonition, after providing these things for the Philippians to dwell on. He tells them to practice *The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me*. The Philippians had *learned and received* from Paul's teaching. Paul exhorts them to cling to that teaching, and follow it. They had also *seen in Paul* his own application of his teaching. Paul exhorts them to follow his example. Paul was incredibly transparent. He says here "What I am telling you is what I do." It is quite a testimony to Paul's integrity.

Paul tells them to *practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you*. The *peace of God* comes with choosing a mindset that is true, dwelling on the things that support that mindset, and making choices consistent with that mindset as we go about our daily life. When we don't have peace, it likely means we are making poor choices. We need to reassess what mindset we have chosen. We need to reemphasize dwelling on the right things. And we need to seek input from others, those who care for our welfare, to help us seek the proper mindset, and cast our cares upon God. The word translated *practice* in this verse is usually translated "do" in other places. One of the three things we control is what we choose to do. Paul admonishes the Philippians to choose to do the things he has set forth, and promises that *the God of peace will be with you*.

Earlier, Paul stated that the "peace of God" would guard our hearts from anxiety if we would trust that God is in control, and that God is benevolent. Now Paul promises that *the God of peace* will be with us when we do the things Paul directs. It is worth noting that at the time Paul penned

this letter, he is in prison, and might be put to death. Christianity was considered illegal in many places, and persecution against Christians was common. None of these circumstances are peaceful. Yet peace is available through faith in the *God of peace*. True *peace* is when all things are as they are intended. That will not be possible in the physical world until Jesus returns and restores all things, creating a new earth in which righteousness dwells (2 Peter 3:13). But it is readily available in the spiritual realm, through faith in the *God of peace*. That peace is appropriated through the intentional act of making choices. Choices to do things that help us adopt a mindset (“*phroneo*”) that is true.

Biblical Text

⁸ Finally, 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, dwell on these things. ⁹ The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.