

Opening Words

It is so important that we hold to these truths about God because there is a law God has built into the universe – we will become like what we worship. We will become like whatever is most important in our lives.

56 Phil Think on *These Things!* 1

Releasing our hearts from worry – we pray, we petition, and we praise God. It's hard sometimes to click off worry, but if we will walk the path of peace, the path of pouring out our heart to God, being specific with him in prayer, and then thanking him for the many blessings he has brought and will bring our way, we will find worry becoming a thing of the past and deep peace a reality in the present.

Today we are going to see another step we can take that will help us in our battle with worry. We have seen how the peace of God will guard our hearts and minds. Now, in our next verses we will see how the God of peace will be with us, but in order to experience the God of peace, there is one thing we have to do. Let's listen to Paul's words in Philippians 4:8-9.

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

It is so important that we not slip back into old patterns of worry and fear. And so once we have built a pattern in our lives of prayer, petition, and praise, and once the peace of God has settled into our lives, we must take the additional step of using our minds in a positive way. We have used them in a negative way with consuming worry, now we must use them in a positive way by focusing our thoughts on what is true and right. Just as nutritious food is good for the body, nutritious thoughts, so to speak, are good for the mind. If we settle into a diet of junk food and sugar water, our bodies and health will show the result. In the same way, if we feed our minds with junk images and junk thoughts, mental and emotional instability will dominate us. I'm sure you have heard the saying:

Sow a thought, reap an action.
Sow an action, reap a habit.
Sow a habit, reap a character.
Sow a character, reap a destiny.

Destiny begins with thoughts. So let's see what Paul tells us to think about. First, he says, whatever is true, think on this. I cannot emphasize adequately how important this is. How often do we think on things that are not true? Let me start at what I consider to be a very basic level – gossip and slander. Gossip and slander, the book of Proverbs says, are like tasty morsels that go deep into our hearts. They are like little appetizers before a meal, finger food that we delight in picking up and swallowing quickly. And while gossip may give accurate information about a person, it's

information we don't need to know if we are not part of the problem or part of the solution. And the aim behind gossip is to get us to think in wrong ways about a person. Slander is spreading lies about a person with the same goal –rather than thinking about a person as a child of God, we think about them as an enemy. But we are not to indulge ourselves of these tasty little morsels of the flesh. We are to let our minds dwell on what is true.

I have also noticed how easy it is to speculate. I have been in so many conversations with people where they speculate about what might be true of a person or situation and then come to a conclusion that “this must be true” of the person or situation and then find out later that our speculation was completely untrue or only a half-baked idea. I have learned to say, “well, maybe, but we need more information.”

As bad as gossip and slander are, I believe what is worse is when people believe lies, and I am not just talking about theological lies or heresies. I am talking about God's people who know the truth but deep in their hearts they believe what is false about God and about themselves. Let me give you some examples.

We know that God is love but we can question his love for us, and we can come to believe that God doesn't love or care for us. Yes, we know the bible verses, we know the theology, but deep in our heart, we may question if God really cares for me. I would not be surprised if someone listening right now is in this condition and you have been thinking on lies rather than on truth.

I believe I have mentioned before that Kathy and I have been involved through the years with a prayer ministry that helps to deliver people from lies. It's not that people walk around boasting in their lies – there are people like that – but good Christian people who can't seem to get free from feeling the lies in their hearts and acting them out. These are lies like, “I am no good,” “No one loves me,” “What happened to me when that person abused me is my fault and I am dirty,” “I am a worthless person,” “I am full of shame,” and so on.

It is tragic to see and hear these things and watch people weep, men as well as women, but oh how glorious it is when the Holy Spirit removes these lies and how glorious it is when the Holy Spirit replaces those lies with truth such as “I am loved by God and others,” “I am valuable to God and others,” “what happened to me was not my fault,” or “I am forgiven and made clean from what I have done.” At this point it is not just theological truth to embrace with one's mind, but it is truth about God and about our self that penetrates deep into the soul.

Living by what is true – that is crucial for us. And that is why Paul said, “finally, brethren, whatever is true, think on that.”

Let me move, though, to the theological area of truth and remind you of four truths we must believe. We must believe the truth about the way God is. He is infinite in power, wisdom, justice, goodness and love, Creator of the universe, eternally existing in three persons – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – each of whom possesses all the attributes of Deity and the characteristics of personality.

It is so important that we hold to these truths about God because there is a law God has built into the universe – we will become like what we worship. We will become like whatever is most important in our lives. And that is why Paul says, “whatever is true, let your mind think on these things.”

We must believe the truth about humanity. God created man in His own image, and man as he was originally created, was innocent before God. But man chose to sin by disobeying God, and therefore was alienated from his Creator and came under divine condemnation. Thus all humans are born with a corrupted nature and without spiritual life, and are totally incapable of pleasing God in and of themselves.

There are two vital things to know about this: because we are made in God’s image we are special. We are not the product of time and chance. We are not just a bunch of chemical reactions that happened to turn into what we call a human over a process of millions of years. We are not just a machine. We are special – we are precious because we are made in God’s image as Genesis 1 teaches us.

But there is something else we must know. We are fallen. We have rebelled against our Maker. We are in sin and the image of God is distorted within us and only the Gospel of Jesus Christ can remedy this dreadful situation in which we find ourselves, reconcile us to God, and restore His image within us.

We must let this two-fold truth about our human nature guide our thinking. If we think that we are only good and special and not fallen or sinful, we will make dreadful decisions in society about humans. If we think that we are only sinful, corrupt, depraved, and wicked we will act that out in our lives and we will be harsh with others. We must hold to the balanced truth of human nature which also prepares us to for the next truth.

The truth of Jesus Christ – He was God in the flesh, both true God and true man. Jesus Christ lived a sinless life and voluntarily suffered and died as our substitute to pay the penalty for our sins, thus satisfying God's justice and accomplishing salvation for all those who trust in Him alone. He rose from the dead in the same body, though glorified, in which He lived and died. He bodily ascended into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God the Father, where He, the King of kings and Lord of lords is the only mediator between God and man, and He makes intercession for His own and one day He will return.

We have to get it right about Jesus. Jesus was a great man, but He was more. Jesus was a great teacher, but He was more. Jesus was a great prophet, but He was more. He was the promised Messiah of God. He was God revealed in the flesh.

In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God and the Word became flesh and lived among us full of grace and truth. John 1:1, 14

And we must get it right about His work. Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth and the life and no one comes to the Father except through Me.” Peter said, “There is salvation in no one else for no other name has been given among men by which we must be saved.

And finally, we must have the truth about salvation – Men and women are freed from the penalty of their sins not as a result, in whole or in part, of their own works, goodness, or religious ceremony, but by the undeserved favor of God alone. God declares righteous all who put their faith in Christ alone for their salvation.

When we let these truths penetrate deep into our souls what a difference it makes in our lives and this is why Paul said, “let your mind dwell on what is true.” The battle begins in the mind, let’s fight the good fight in this area, glorify God and bring joy to our lives and to others.