

Lesson 18

The Power of Christ-like Thinking

Philippians 4:8-9

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. In the last two Sunday morning messages, we have been talking about how to prevent worry and how to conquer worry when it gets started. The Christian can prevent worry before it gets started by rejoicing in the Lord with a confident trust that He has all things under control. When the Christian falls into worry, it can be conquered by trusting prayer in which every request, big or little, is made known to God. Prayer brings a peace which is supernatural into the heart. It is the peace of God which passes all human understanding. NOTE. The peace of God is related to trusting in God, and trust is related to the control of one's mind (***Isa. 26:3 KJV: Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee.***). A mind not stayed on God cannot have the peace of God. Without God's peace, we will worry, so one of the ways to defeat worry is to have a positive, biblical attitude towards life.
- B. The mind is a key to winning over worry, for, according to the Bible, a man is what he thinks (***Prov. 23:7 KJV: For as he thinketh in his heart so is he.***). Someone has said, "We are not what others think we are but what we think we are." Our dominant thoughts tend to externalize themselves; that is, what we think of most on the inside shows up on the outside in behavior. Marcus Aurelius said, "A man's life is what his thoughts make of it." Ralph Waldo Emerson stated this truth in another way, "A man is what he thinks about all day long."
- C. All of life is made up of infinite situations. How a person thinks about any given situation will determine how he acts or reacts to it. A Christian can have only two viewpoints about any situation that may arise in his life. He can have a human viewpoint that looks at life purely on a human level, in which he tries to solve the problem by human effort. The human viewpoint invariably leads to frustration, worry and general unhappiness. However, the Christian can have a divine viewpoint about a situation, viewing it from the standpoint of God's sovereignty, in which the Christian knows that all things are under God's control (***Rom. 8:28: And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him.***). The result is a peace which comes from God, who knows the end from the beginning, who does all things right and well, and who will not permit in the life of His children anything that will not work out for eternal good. NOTE. Worry is a human viewpoint. There are many situations in life which come to all of us where we must learn to trust God or lose our minds. In any given situation, after we have done what

we can, then we must pray and trust God to work it out. To have a divine viewpoint is to have an attitude of trust in God.

- II. A CHRIST-CONTROLLED MIND 4:8: ***Finally, brothers, 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.***
- A. Christians believe in biblical, Christ-centered, self-imposed thought control. This thought control is critical to our development in holiness and Christ-likeness. Christians are to meditate on positive things. They are to assimilate positive thoughts into their lives and be changed by them. Paul gives a list of positive things such as truth, right and purity and commands the Christian to “think about such things.” NOTE. This verse gives much enlightenment on an important psychological principle. The principle is that if people wish to subdue and conquer evil thoughts or worry, they must not fight against them only, for this just focuses one’s attention more on the evil thoughts and brings more frustration. They must substitute evil thoughts with good thoughts. They must replace negative thinking with positive, biblical, Christ-like thinking. NOTE. Christians, believing in the reality of sin in the Christian life, know that sin is a dynamic force for evil. Christians are to fight off the temptations to sin but, if we just negatively fight off sin, our minds are focused upon the temptation or the problem, bringing great frustration. Christians must build and train the mind to think positive, Christ-like thoughts which will push out the negative thoughts. NOTE. John Wesley said, “You can’t prevent a bird flying over your head, but you can prevent it making a nest in your hair.” So it is with evil thoughts. We should do all we can to prevent them from entering our minds. If they do enter (and some do) it is not wrong. It is only wrong if we harbor these evil thoughts.
- B. Christ’s Thoughts 4:8a
1. ***Finally, brothers,*** -- Paul draws his conclusion about conquering worry and fighting sin for true believers in Christ. The way to win over worry and to resist sin is to have positive, biblical, Christ-like thinking.
 2. ***Whatever is true,*** -- This is speaking of truth over against falsehood. God is truth and He wants His people to operate on truth. Lying and deceit should never have a part in the Christian’s lifestyle. Today in our courts of law, they assume people are going to lie rather than tell the truth. This world is in a sad state but we Christians should never be party to anything but what is true. NOTE. Where does the Christian find truth? Only in the Bible. We Christians are to saturate our minds with the truth of scripture and then we will be a people who are true to Christ, true to one another and true to our convictions. NOTE. Truth also prevents worry. Most of the things we worry about are not realistic and never come about. Most of our worries are totally unfounded, not based on truth. Therefore, we must be sure what we are thinking about has any

semblance of truth in it. Again, the only truth we can count on is God's truth – the Bible. As Christians, we must spend the vast majority of our time learning truth rather than trying to refute error. Truth alone changes the Christian into Christ-likeness.

3. ***Whatever is noble***, -- This literally means “honorable.” Christians are to think about things which are honorable, noble, honest. The whole behavior of a Christian should be characterized by genuine motives, manners and morals. The Christian should be morally attractive and this can only come by thinking positive thoughts.

4. ***Whatever is right***, -- Christians are to meditate on God's justice and righteous standards, and see how it all relates to the saved and unsaved worlds. We Christians are to govern ourselves by the Golden Rule – “In everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets” (Matt. 7:12). The Golden Rule is “Do unto others as you would have them do to you.” Yet the Golden Rule of the world is, “Do it unto others before they do it unto you.” Also a second Golden Rule of the world is, “He who has the gold rules.” The world is always self-centered but Christianity is others centered. NOTE. We Christians are to think on good things, right things and wholesome things. Just because something is true does not make it right. It is right when it builds us up, when it edifies us, when it encourages us. The sinful mind loves to dwell on problems that may be true but do not build us up. For instance, the newspaper is filled with tragedy, crisis, violence, sexual perversion, war, political corruption because newspapers know the human mind is more attracted to negative thinking than positive thinking. No one, the newspaper people reason, would read only good news because the mind loves to wallow in the negative. We must train the mind to think positive thoughts!

5. ***Whatever is pure***, -- Christians are to avoid things which are filthy and would corrupt the mind. They are to think on things which are wholesome and morally pure. We are not to permit our minds to become catacombs full of wriggling vermin of licentious thought. Our minds are to graze in what is pure. We must not pollute and contaminate the mind with impure garbage. An impure thought always precedes an impure deed. Our minds are God-created computers. Therefore, we are to control what goes into them. Why? Because what goes into the mind comes out in behavior. We are the sum total of what we put into our minds. What our minds contemplate, our bodies carry out. NOTE. What does this mean for you and me? We are to guard what we read, what we watch on TV and at the movies, and what kind of music we listen to. The criterion for judging is this: is what my mind is recording building up or tearing up my personal relationship with Jesus Christ? NOTE. To think on pure things does not mean we are to stick our heads in the sand in an effort to be unaware or uninformed as to what is going on around us. It does mean, however, that we are not to stuff our heads with slime as we so often do.

Think, for a moment, of the influence of television on our minds. By the time the average student in America graduates from high school he has spent 15,000 hours watching television. This is the equivalent of two entire years! His schooling, up to that point, (12 years) has consisted of only 10,800 hours. He is conditioned by what he sees and hears on television. It affects his value system and his whole way of thinking.

6. ***Whatever is lovely***, -- The word means “winsome” or “pleasing.” As we embrace thoughts which are lovely, we will bar from entrance into our minds thoughts which are not pleasing. We will bar from our minds thoughts which foster worry and anxiety.

Thomas a Kempis traced the successive steps of a successful temptation. The first step is the bare thought as it enters the mind. The second step is that we picture in our imagination how sweet this sin would be...we hang that picture on the walls of our mind. The third step is as we contemplate it, the picture drips... drop by drop... sweet syrup into the heart until the heart fills up and the will gives in to the filled up heart.

7. ***Whatever is admirable*** – This word means “well-sounding” or “appealing.” The King James Version translates it, “Whatsoever things are of good report.” Christians are not to listen to gossip about other people. Their minds are to receive and think good things about other people. ILLUSTRATION: Methodists. In 1752, a group of men, including John and Charles Wesley, who were nicknamed Methodist, signed a covenant which every man hung on his study wall. The six articles of the solemn agreement follow:

1. That we will not listen or willingly inquire after ill concerning one another;
2. That, if we do hear any ill of each other, we will not be forward to believe it;
3. That as soon as possible we will communicate what we hear by speaking or writing to the person concerned;
4. That until we have done this, we will not write or speak a syllable of it to any other person.
5. That neither will we mention it, after we have done this, to any other person;
6. That we will not make any exception to any of these rules unless we think ourselves absolutely obliged in conference.

8. ***If anything is excellent or praiseworthy*** – This is just a summary of what was said, and that is that we Christians are to put our minds on things that are of moral excellence and things that the heart can praise.

C. Christ's Command 4:8b: **Think about such things.**

1. This is a command. Christians are to be habitually and constantly thinking about these positive things. They are to give deep meditation to moral excellence because this glorifies God.
2. Training the Mind. If the Christian is to substitute bad thoughts with good thoughts, this involves disciplining the mind to think Christ's thoughts after Him (**2 Cor. 10:5...and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.**). We can't be sinning and worrying and thinking Christ-like thoughts at the same time. NOTE. How do we train our minds for Christ? The first step is honest self-examination. We must evaluate where we are allowing bad thoughts to contaminate our minds. Questions need to be asked such as what am I reading? How much T. V. am I watching and what kind of programs? Why do I attend certain kinds of movies? Am I disciplining my mind for the purpose of godliness (**1 Tim. 4:7...train yourself to be godly.**)? The second step is self-crucifixion. We must deny ourselves, dying to selfish desires and wants. Discipline means saying no to our desires, things which the flesh enjoys but are not good for our spiritual lives. The third step is self-discipline in that we are to develop right habits. We should read our bibles devotionally daily, memorize scripture, so we can wake up and go to bed thinking about Christ. We should read Christian books and listen to Christian radio (at least to the good programs). We should listen to positive Christian and secular music which will edify us. We might read Christian biographies and books on missionaries. Does this mean we never read a secular novel or listen to secular music? No, but it does mean that whatever we read and listen to must build the Christian mind and not tear it down. The mind must be trained to think God's thoughts after Him.
1. Optimistic Thinking. To be thinking positive, spiritual thoughts is to be a Christian-optimist. There are some people who are pessimistic by nature and do not see a glass of water half full but half empty. A Christian can be a realist and an optimist at the same time. In fact, a Spirit-filled Christian is a realistic-optimist because He knows, whatever is happening, he has God on his side.

The thought of pessimistic Christians reminds me of the story of the pessimistic farmer. There were two farmers. One was a pessimist, the other was an optimist. The optimist would say, "Wonderful sunshine." The pessimist would reply, "Yeah, I'm afraid it's going to scorch the crops." The optimist would say, "Fine rain." The pessimist would respond, "Yeah, I'm afraid we are going to have a flood." One day the optimist said to the pessimist, "Have you seen my new bird dog? He's the finest money can buy." The pessimist said, "You mean that mutt I saw penned up behind your house? He don't look like much to me." The optimist said, "How about going hunting with me tomorrow?" The pessimist agreed. They went. They shot some ducks. The ducks landed on the pond. The optimist ordered his dog to

get the ducks. The dog obediently responded. Instead of swimming in the water after the ducks, the dog walked on top of the water, retrieved the ducks, and walked back on top of the water. The optimist turned to the pessimist and said, "Now, what do you think of that?" Whereupon the pessimist replied, "Hum, the dumb mutt can't swim either, can he?" POINT. How many negative and pessimistic Christians there are that almost refuse to take a divine viewpoint towards life? The result is that they lack the peace and joy of Christ in their lives.

III. A CHRIST-CONTROLLED ACTION 4:9a

- A. ***Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me*** – The Philippians had heard about and seen the life of the Apostle Paul. His life was an example and testimony to others. Paul was a man who lived as a realistic-optimist with a divine viewpoint about life. His life was spiritually and morally attractive to others. NOTE. Our Christian testimony before other men is very important. Many folks give the appearance of being Christian-atheists; that is, they profess Christ but live as though God does not exist. If the non-Christian world sees a Christian deep in worry or filling up his mind with garbage, they may conclude that the God of the Christian does not exist or the professing Christian has had some kind of psychological religious experience with no reality of God whatsoever.

Pastor and Son's Death. I once heard a true story about a pastor who was trying to win a lawyer to Christ but was totally unsuccessful. The lawyer's ten year old son was killed in a bicycle wreck, and he was very bitter towards God. He complained, and groaned and mocked God, for a living God would not permit his son to die. About six months after his son's death, the pastor lost his son in an automobile accident. The boy was only eight. The pastor, with tears in his eyes, thanked God for taking his precious son, and told all that God had a right to do as He pleased in heaven and earth. So touched was this lawyer with this man's attitude in the midst of crisis, that the lawyer realized that the pastor's God was real. It was only a few days later that the pastor led the lawyer to the Lord. Why? Because the lawyer saw the reality of Christ in this pastor's life.

- A. ***Put it into practice.*** – This should be translated, "Put this into habitual practice." It takes practice to make the mind submissive to God's sovereign will. The mind, even in the Christian, is naturally rebellious, but, by Christ's gracious help, it can be trained to submit to God. NOTE. One of the best ways to keep from sinning or worrying is to get to work so as to occupy the mind with positive thoughts rather than negative ones. If we are busy doing things for Christ, then we do not have time to worry.

Many of us have seen the bumper sticker, "Help fight poverty. Go to work!" The bumper sticker one might devise for Philippians 4:9 is, "Help fight worry. Go to work!"

IV. A CHRIST-CENTERED PEACE 4:9b: ***And the God of peace will be with you.***

- A. Notice that Paul now speaks of the “God of Peace.” In 4:7, he spoke of the “peace of God.” Now, through having Christ-like thoughts and having a divine viewpoint about life, one can know the God of peace. The source of the peace of God is found in knowing, loving and obeying the God of peace. NOTE. This is what our Lord Jesus meant when He promised His peace to His disciples. This is the peace that wins over worry, fear and anxiety (***John 14:27: Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.***).

- B. There is more to this verse, however. If we have a life of prayer, if we have positive, biblical mental attitudes, if we practice what we believe, we have the fantastic promise that the God of peace will be with us. God will bless us in our desires and wants because our first and primary desire is to please Him whom to know is eternal life (***Psa. 37:4: Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart.***). NOTE. Do you want to experience God? Then do these things which are mentioned in Philipians four.

V. CONCLUSION

- A. For you without Christ in your life, I would like to turn your attention to the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ, the Savior. Christ alone can calm the storm inside the human heart.

- B. The storm of frustration inside of all men is really sin according to the Bible, and, until one finds forgiveness for that sin, there will only be warfare and no peace with God.

- C. Christ came to forgive our sins, to take away the guilt of sin, and to bring peace within the human soul. Jesus Christ can bring you peace with God and can bring to you the God of peace, so you can know Him in a personal way.

- D. What must you do to be a Christian? Receive Christ into your life, acknowledging Him as your Savior from sin and as Lord of your life, giving Him the right to take control of your whole personality. Only Christ can calm the storm within the human heart.