



Ministry of the Word

*Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> October 2016*

by Vincent Gannon

**Scripture:** Philippians 4:1-9

**Subject:** Chapter 4 Part 4 – The Noble Character

Who would you hold up as being a biblical sound, every day, practicing, Christian? If it's not you, then you have plenty of room for improvement. Paul's desire for every believer, be they yesterdays, today's or even tomorrows people of God, is that they have Godly characteristics. We have as a result of 'The Fall' inherited sinful natures and flawed characters, but when we come to Christ the Bible says in 2 Corinthians 5:17 that we are ***"New Creatures in Christ"*** and this is not a standalone verse, see Galatians 6:15.

As you know, when we are saved we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. The Bible teaches us that once this occurs, we receive a new nature, with very different desires and a heart that is after the Lord. Do you believe this? We believe that God speaks to us from His word, the Bible. Do we recognise and realise that God wants only the best for His children? I hope so. The real crunch comes when we place our knowledge alongside our daily living. Let us be very honest with ourselves, and confess that our daily living does not always reflect what we profess.

Are we really concerned about what God says and how we live His instructions out on a daily basis? Paul instructs us to ***"dwell on these things"***, do you do that? The word ***"dwell"*** is

interesting. It means to reside, stay, settle, inhabit, have your home. It's more than just a nice thought or an interesting point of view. It is really a command but from whom? Paul or the Spirit of God? For many of God's people they seem confused or not too sure of the answer to this question.

Let me put it another way, we all know what we would like God to do for us, right? But what do we want God to do in us? I'm not convinced that a lot of believers have got that far. Not in the sense of what Paul is teaching here. You want spiritual gift's that's good but what about spiritual character? When is the last time you prayed for these qualities to be your possession? We need to search our hearts afresh and seek the Lord even more.

Our society admires people who stand firm, hold to their convictions, are courageous and bold, and cannot be bought, intimidated, or defeated. If courage of conviction, integrity, credibility, and an uncompromising devotional virtue are admirable qualities for people of the world, how much more essential are they for Christians? The very name "Christian" identifies believers with Jesus Christ, who is the most perfect model of uncompromising, courageous integrity who ever walked the earth. The New Testament repeatedly commands believers to follow Him by standing firm in submission to God (Cross reference with Philippians 1:27; 1 Corinthians 16:13; 2 Corinthians 1:24; Galatians 5:1; Ephesians 6:11,13, 14; 1 Thessalonians 3:8; 2 Thessalonians 2:15; Hebrews 3:6&14; 1 Peter 5:9&12). I would encourage you to study these verses if you're serious about developing Godly character.

There is the other problem within the church; we think of the Gospel as only the salvation message, when it is far more than that. It is the whole message of the Bible for the believer. It is Not what we chose or pick due to whatever we think as being suitable for us. Either, God has spoken from His Word and I have heard or I am spiritually dead and in need of salvation.

Paul was concerned for his beloved Philippian congregation to be unwavering in the faith. From Philippians 4:2-9 seven basic principles for developing and maintaining spiritual stability emerge. In our previous studies we considered the first four: cultivating harmony in the church fellowship, maintaining a spirit of joy, learning to be content, and resting on a confident faith in the Lord.

In this study we will consider the last three over two Parts:

1. Reacting to Problems with Thankful Prayer
2. Thinking on Godly virtues
3. Obeying God's standards

## **REACTING TO PROBLEMS WITH THANKFUL PRAYER**

*“but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”* (Philippians 4:6b-7)

Spiritually stable people react to trials with thankful prayer. Such prayer is the antidote to worry and the cure for anxiety. The theology of prayer is not in view here, but rather its priority and the attitude the believer brings to it. The three synonyms used here, **prayer**, **supplication**, and **requests**, all refer to specific, direct offerings of petition to God. The assumption of the text is that believers will cry out to God when they have a need or a problem, not with doubting, questioning, or even blaming God, but **with thanksgiving** (Cross reference with Colossians 4:2). Instead of having a spirit of rebellion against what God allows, believers are to trustingly cast

*“all their anxiety on Him, because He cares for them”* (1 Peter 5:7)

God's promises support the wisdom of gratitude. He has promised that no trial believers face will be too difficult for them to handle (1 Corinthians 10:13). He has also promised to use everything that happens in believers' lives for their ultimate good (Romans 8:28). Even suffering leads to them being perfected, confirmed, strengthened, and established (1 Peter 5:10). Believers should also be thankful for

-  **God's power** (Psalms 62:11; 1 Peter 1:5; Revelation 4:11),
-  **for His promises** (Deuteronomy 1:11; 2 Corinthians 1:20),
-  **for the hope of relief from suffering** (2 Corinthians 4:17; 1 Peter 5:10),
-  **for the hope of glory** (Romans 5:2; Colossians 1:27),
-  **for His mercy** (Romans 15:9),
-  **and for His perfecting work in them** (Philippians 1:6).

People become worried, anxious, and fearful because they do not trust in God's wisdom, power, or goodness. They fear that God is not wise enough, strong enough, or good enough to prevent disaster. It may be that this sinful doubt is because of their knowledge of Him

is faulty, or that sin in their lives has crippled their faith. Thankful prayer brings release from fear and worry, because it affirms God's sovereign control over every circumstance, and that His purpose is the believer's good (Romans 8:28).

Once the sinner has made **"peace with God"** (Romans 5:1), that is, in salvation having ceased to be God's enemy and became His child, they can enjoy the **peace of God**, the inward tranquillity of soul granted by God. It is a confident trust in His flawless wisdom and infinite power that provides calm amid the storms of life. Isaiah wrote of this supernatural peace:

*"The steadfast of mind You will keep in perfect peace, because he trusts in You"*  
(Isaiah 26:3).

Paul prayed for the Romans that

*"the God of hope would fill them with all joy and peace in believing"*  
(Romans 15:13).

In his high priestly blessing on Israel Aaron said,

*"The Lord lift up His countenance on you, and give you peace"* (Numbers 6:26).

In Psalm 29:11 David wrote, *"The Lord will bless His people with peace"*

Shortly before His death Jesus promised,

*"Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful"* (John 14:27).

God's peace is not for everyone, however;

*"There is no peace for the wicked, says the Lord"* (Isaiah 48:22),

neither *with* God, nor *from* God.

Paul further defines this supernatural peace as that **which surpasses all comprehension**. It transcends human intellectual powers, human analysis, human insights, and human understanding. It is superior to human scheming, human devices, and human solutions, since its source is the God whose judgments are unsearchable and whose ways are unfathomable (Romans 11:33). It is experienced in a transcendent calm that lifts the believer above the most debilitating trial. Since it is a supernatural work, it resists any human **comprehension**. The real challenge of the Christian life is not to eliminate every unpleasant

circumstance; it is to trust in the good purpose of our infinite, holy, sovereign, powerful God in every difficulty. Those who honour Him by trusting Him will experience the blessings of His perfect peace.

When realized in believers' lives, God's peace **will guard** them from anxiety, doubt, and worry. **Φρουρέω** : *phroureó* meaning *will guard*, is a military term used of soldiers on guard duty. The picture would have been familiar to the Philippians, since the Romans stationed troops in Philippi to protect their interests in that part of the world. Just as soldiers guard and protect a city, so God's peace, guards and protects believers who confidently trust in Him. Paul's use of the phrase **hearts** and **minds** was not intended to imply a distinction between the two; he was merely making a comprehensive reference to the believer's inner person. Once again, Paul reminds his readers that true peace is not available through any human source, but only **in Christ Jesus**.

#### **THINKING ON GODLY VIRTUES**

*“Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, 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.”* (Philippians 4:8)

The word **finally** indicates that Paul has arrived at the climax of his teaching on spiritual stability. The principle that he is about to relate is both the summation of all the others and the key to implementing them. The phrase **dwell on these things** introduces an important truth: spiritual stability is a result of how a person thinks. The Greek word *meaning to dwell on* makes it a command; proper thinking is not optional in the Christian life. It means more than just entertaining thoughts; it means to evaluate; to consider; or to calculate. Believers are to consider the qualities Paul lists in this verse and meditate on their implications. It calls for habitual discipline of the mind to set all thoughts on these spiritual virtues.

The Bible leaves no doubt that people's lives are the product of their thoughts. Proverbs 23:7 declares,

*“For as he thinks within himself, so he is”*

The modern counterpart to that proverb is the computer acronym GIGO (Garbage In, Garbage Out). Just as a computer's output is dependent on the information that is input, so people's actions are the result of their thinking.

Jesus expressed that truth in Mark 7:20-23:

*"That which proceeds out of the man that is what defiles the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man"*

Paul's call for biblical thinking is especially relevant in our culture. The focus today is on emotion and pragmatism, and the importance of serious thinking about biblical truth is downplayed. People no longer ask *"Is it true?"* but *"Does it work?"* and *"How will it make me feel?"* Those two questions serve as a working definition of truth in our society that rejects the concept of absolute divine truth. The world perceives **Truth** to be whatever works and produces positive emotions.

Sadly, such pragmatism and emotionalism has crept even into Christian theology. The church is often more concerned about whether something will be divisive or offensive than whether it is biblically true.

Such a perspective is far different from the noble Bereans, who searched the Scriptures to see if what Paul said was true, not whether it was divisive or practical (Acts 17:11). Too many people go to church not to think or reason about the truths of Scripture, but to get their weekly spiritual high; to feel that God is still with them. Such people are spiritually unstable because they base their lives on feelings rather than on thinking. Bill Hull writes,

*"What scares me is the anti-intellectual, anti-critical-thinking philosophy that has spilled over into the Church. This philosophy tends to romanticise the faith, making the local church into an experience centre... Their concept of "church" is that they are spiritual consumers and that the church's job is to meet their felt needs. (Hull B, 1985, p66)*

John Stott also warned of the danger of Christians living by their feelings:

*"Indeed, sin has more dangerous effects on our faculty of feeling than on our faculty of thinking, because our opinions are more easily checked and regulated by revealed truth than our experiences" (Stott J, 1972, p16)*

God commands people to think. He said to rebellious Israel,

*"Come now, and let us reason together" (Isaiah 1:18).*

Jesus chided the unbelieving Pharisees and Sadducees for demanding a miraculous sign from Him. Instead, He challenged them to think and draw inferences from the evidence they had, just as they did to predict the weather (Matthew 16:1-3). In Luke 12:57 He said to the crowds,

*"And why do you not even on your own initiative judge what is right?"*

God gave His revelation in a book, the Bible, and expects people to use their minds to understand its truths. Careful thinking is the distinctive mark of the Christian faith.

James Orr expressed that reality clearly:

*"If there is a religion in the world which exalts the office of teaching, it is safe to say that it is the religion of Jesus Christ. It has been frequently remarked that in pagan religions the doctrinal element is at a minimum—the chief thing there is the performance of a ritual. But this is precisely where Christianity distinguishes itself from other religions—it does contain doctrine. It comes to men with definite, positive teaching; it claims to be the truth; it bases religion on knowledge, though a knowledge which is only attainable under moral conditions. I do not see how anyone can deal fairly with the facts as they lie before us in the Gospels and Epistles, without coming to the conclusion that the New Testament is full of doctrine.... A religion divorced from earnest and lofty thought has always, down the whole history of the Church, tended to become weak, irreverent, and unwholesome; while the intellect, deprived of its rights within religion, has sought its satisfaction without, and developed into godless rationalism."*

(Orr J., 1897, pp20-21)

Scripture describes the unsaved mind as

-  **depraved** (Romans 1:28; 1 Timothy 6:5; 2 Timothy 3:8),
-  **focused on the flesh** (Romans 8:5),
-  **which leads to spiritual death** (Romans 8:6),
-  **hostile to God** (Romans 8:7; Colossians 1:21),
-  **foolish** (1 Corinthians 2:14),
-  **hardened to spiritual truth** (2 Corinthians 3:14),
-  **blinded by Satan** (2 Corinthians 4:4),
-  **futile** (Ephesians 4:17),
-  **ignorant** (Ephesians 4:18),
-  **and defiled** (Titus 1:15).

Because of that, the first element in salvation is a proper mental understanding of the truth of the gospel. Jesus said in Matthew 13:19,

*"When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart"*

Romans 10:17 could be translated,

*"Faith comes from hearing a speech about Christ",*

emphasizing again that faith involves thinking (Cross reference with Isaiah 1:18). That is why Peter commands believers to always be

*"ready to make a defence to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you" (1 Peter 3:15).*

J. Gresham Machen observed,

*"What the Holy Spirit does in the new birth is not to make a man a Christian regardless of the evidence, but on the contrary to clear away the mists from his eyes and enable him to attend to the evidence." (Machen J.G., 1965, pp63)*

God saves people to be worshipers, and

*"those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:24).*

It is therefore impossible to worship God apart from truth. When Paul visited Athens, the cultural capital of the ancient world,

*"his spirit was being provoked within him as he was observing the city full of idols" (Acts 17:16).*

But what disturbed him as much as the blatant idolatry was that he

*"found an altar with this inscription, 'TO AN UNKNOWN GOD'" (Acts 17:23).*

Natural minds can see the world and conclude that there is a God but by human reason it can only be known that He exists, not who He is. To the natural reason He is the "unknown" and the unknowable God. He can only be truly known by supernatural theology, the revelation of Scripture. God will not accept worship based on ignorance. Paul therefore proceeded to explain to the Athenian philosophers who God has revealed Himself to be (Acts 17:24-31).

In sharp contrast to the contemporary definition of faith, biblical faith is not an irrational 'leap in the dark', blind faith. It is not a mystical encounter with a divine force nor is it optimism, psychological self-hypnosis, or wishful thinking. True faith is a reasoned response to the revealed truth in the Bible, and salvation results from an intelligent response, prompted by the Holy Spirit, to that truth.

In Matthew 6:25-34, Jesus rebuked the disciples for the sin of worry. In a remarkable section of his classic work *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones points out that the disciples' problem was that they failed to think. Instead, they allowed themselves to be controlled by their circumstances.

*"Faith, according to our Lord's teaching in this paragraph, is primarily thinking; and the whole trouble with a man of little faith is that he does not think. He allows circumstances to beat him. That is the real difficulty in life. Life comes to us with a club in its hand and strikes us upon the head, and we become incapable of thought, helpless and defeated. The way to avoid that, according to our Lord, is to think. We must spend more time in studying our Lord's lessons in observation and deduction. The Bible is full of logic, and we must never think of faith as something purely mystical. We do not just sit down in an armchair and expect marvellous things to happen to us. That is not Christian faith. Christian faith is essentially thinking. Look at the birds, think about them, and draw your deductions. Look at the grass, look at the lilies of the field, consider them.*

*The trouble with most people, however, is that they will not think. Instead of doing this, they sit down and ask, What is going to happen to me? What can I do? That is the absence of thought; it is surrender, it is defeat. Our Lord, here, is urging us to think, and to think in a Christian manner. That is the very essence of faith. Faith, if you like, can be defined like this: It is a man insisting upon thinking when everything seems determined to bludgeon and knock him down in an intellectual sense. The trouble with the person of little faith is that, instead of controlling his own thought, his thought is being controlled by something else, and, as we put it, he goes round and round in circles. That is the essence of worry.... That is not thought; that is the absence of thought, a failure to think."*

(Lloyd-Jones M., 1971, pp:129-30)

Thinking is essential to saving faith, as well as to sanctifying faith.

We will leave it there this week and next time will continue on with this point and then finish off the third point.

Amen

***References for Philippians Chapter 4 – Part 4 (A&B):***

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