**THINK ON THESE THINGS (#5)**

***Things Virtuous & Praiseworthy***

*“Finally, brethren, whatever things are true… noble… just… pure… lovely… of good report,* ***if*** *there is any virtue and* ***if*** *there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things”* (Phil. 2:8)

Paul desperately wants his dear friends in Philippi to embrace God’s joy and peace (4:4-7). But they are struggling to do so, just like we are. He had previously told them in chapter two that they lived in a “*crooked and perverse generation*” (also translated “*warped and twisted society*” – Phil. 2:15). Surrounded by the darkness of sin they were told to “*shine among them like stars in the sky*” (NIV). But how? He gives them the secret – it starts in the head, goes to the heart, then leads to the hands and feet. How you “*think*” makes all the difference in attitude. While happiness is so often based on outward “happen-stance” – Joy is based on inward faith that comes through Praying (v. 6), Pondering (v. 8) and Practicing (v. 9).

In our keynote text above notice the word “***if.***” After giving six qualities every Christian should meditate on Paul changes the sentence structure from “whatever” to “*IF*” in order to sum up those previous attributes. Ultimately what every Christian must dwell on in order to find peace is in the bundled package called “Virtue & Praise.” Let’s explore these today and in doing so find God’s gift of JOY. Think on…

***Things of Virtue.***

*ARETE* is a most fascinating word in Greek. It was used whenever the Greeks wanted to describe the highest standard of excellence in any given field. It stood for quality that was extraordinary. Just this morning I filled out a survey for a company that had served my needs. They asked me to rate their service from 1 to 10, with 10 being “Excellent.” I rarely give a 10 to a company but their service over the past years, along with their very prompt and courteous employees who answered my calls left me with a great feeling. I gave them a “10.” That is ARETE. It is the highest standard in any given field, whether academic, athletic, corporate, military, artistic or spiritual.

God can read my heart and even “*the thoughts and intents of my heart*” (Heb. 4:13). Think on that. What I’m thinking right now, even subconsciously, is known by God. That means I will not just be judged for the physical act of fornication, but by the lust in my heart which led to the act (Matt. 5:27-28). That is exactly why David prayed after his adultery with Bathsheba:
“*You desire truth in the inward parts, and in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom … Blot out all my iniquities; create in me a clean heart O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me*” (Psa. 51:6,10).

*ARETE’* – when used in the New Testament – is a moral excellence that is traced to the very presence of God. We have been called by God’s virtue (2 Pet. 1:3), that is God’s glorious excellence. He is the high bar, the perfect standard, to which our thoughts must soar. That is why Peter says, “*Add to your faith* ***virtue***…” (2 Pet. 1:5).

Biblical faith starts with virtue, the highest standard of excellence traced right back to God Himself. That means my faith is not just something I read in the Bible (Rom. 10:17 “*faith comes by hearing*…”), but something I have studied diligently (2 Tim. 2:15) and then spent hours, days, weeks, months, and years thinking about until it is so deeply engrained in my soul that it changes every word and deed of my life. Paul put it this way: “*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly … whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus*” (Col. 3:16-17).

In God’s steps of salvation there is faith (Heb. 11:6), repentance (Ac. 17:30), confession (Rom. 10:10), and baptism (Gal. 3:27). By far the hardest step is faith. Why? Saving faith is not just a set of rules to keep, but a way of life that comes from virtuous (excellent) meditation. It is a faith that says, “*The Lord is at hand*” (Phil. 4:5) and acts as if He really is. That takes deep thinking that is raised to a level **10** on God’s scale. Yes, it’s hard work – very hard work – but the reward is out of this world!

***Things That Are Praiseworthy.***

Far, far too many folks, including Christians, think negative thoughts about others. They have critical spirits which look for the faults in others instead of the good. If I want to enjoy God’s peace then I must take on a worldview that sees things from God’s vertical perspective, not man’s horizontal vision. Let me see others as those made in God’s image, and for whom Christ lovingly and willingly gave His life. Ask God to help you see the world through His eyes, not the cynical vision of the world. When I look for the good in others, if nothing more than the just the prospects of their salvation, I will change my attitude about all men. The glass will be half-full, not half-empty. Positive, praise-worthy thinking leads to positive, praise-worthy living. And that leads to JOY.

Praise-worthy means … worthy of praise. Profound, huh? But God is telling us to focus on the spark of divinity we can see in humans and look for opportunities to speak a kind word and do a random act of kindness to our fellow man. That is how we let our “*light so shine before men*” which leads the world to “*glorify your Father in heaven*” (Matt. 5:16). And God’s glory is the very purpose for your life. If God so loved the world then I must love the world too (Jn. 3:16). If Jesus came to serve (Matt. 20:28) and save (Lk. 19:10) the world, then I must serve and save too. To do that I must think praise-worthy thoughts every single day!

Do you know that “praiseworthy” is the Greek word *EPAINOS*, and carries among its meanings the idea of “giving applause.” Think how you would feel if others suddenly gave you a standing ovation after you said or did something. You would feel honored. God is asking us to think in terms of praise, of giving applause, to both God and men. That is just another way of saying for us to look for the good, not the bad, in people.

So today, then tomorrow, then the next day, let us think on things that are true, noble, just, pure, lovely, commendable, virtuous and praiseworthy. If we do, the God of peace will be with you.

Rejoice in the Lord. – Rick