



## **SUPER JOY - A STUDY IN PHILIPPIANS** (Week 13) - How To Think

### **Introduction - context of Philippians**

### **Philippians 4:8-9**

8 Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. 9 What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

**In other words, here's how to think and here's how to act. The connection between thinking and acting is that our thinking determines how we feel about something or someone**

and how we feel often determines how we act.

In the biography of William Tyndale that I'm reading, Tyndale once wrote, "Where the Spirit is there is feeling, for the Spirit maketh us feel all things. Where the Spirit is not there is no feeling, but a vain opinion or imagination."

Teems, David. *Tyndale: The Man Who Gave God an English Voice* (p. 208). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

In this sense, Scripture helps regulate our feelings.

This passage isn't about the power of positive thinking, because positive thinking wants to ignore the negatives of reality. Scripture never does that. Scripture never ignores the negative reality of the human condition. The point of this passage is that our mindset is important. How we think is important.

What he's really telling these ladies is, "What will improve your relationship is how you think about one another."

It is easy to confirm the doctrine of human sinfulness.

- Tyndale's discouragement - "As I now am, very death were more pleasant to me than life, considering man's nature to be such as can bear no truth."

This is why Paul encourages us to think on these things.

- Can you find any of these traits in the person you're having relationship difficulties with?
- In what way has this person acted in accordance with the truth? That's something you can rejoice in. How have they acted honorably? If you're having relationship difficulties with someone, go down the list until you find something.
- Pollyanna and the glad game

So, that's the application to interpersonal relationships. Now, let's look at a wider apologetic application.

*whatever is true*

**Notice that everything on this list...**

whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

Someone has to define these things, because each one of these things has an exact opposite. That means if we define these things incorrectly then we distort things and give honor to something or someone that is dishonorable. We end up calling evil good and good evil. That is the nature of sin — humanity independently defining reality.

That's why Jesus said,

## **John 17:17**

17 Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.

There are two views of truth in our culture. One view (the view that falls in line with the Bible's view) is that truth corresponds to reality. This means that when something is true it matches reality.

For instance, the Bible claims that something that is true about humanity is that we are sinners by nature and by choice. When people say things like, "Nobody's perfect," they say this because it matches reality.

Whether they understand the Bible's teaching on the sinful nature and what that means is another issue. The point is that truth matches reality. And the truth that is self-evident is that

human nature is utterly flawed. Humanity is tainted by something the Bible calls sin.

The other view of truth is that we can't be sure of what truth is because of our own subjectivity. This basically means that we can't be sure about anything because we interpret everything through the filter of our own limited experiences.

This viewpoint is really an overreaction to the modern mindset. When science made great strides, it created this mindset that now we could know true things objectively, because science is objective.

Humanity became overconfident about what we could discover about the universe, not realizing that science itself is not purely objective because it is conducted by human beings. So, there is some truth to this reaction, but it overplays its hand. Just because human beings are subjective doesn't mean we can't know true truth both about the material world and the spiritual realm.

In her book, *Longing to Know*, Esther Lightcap Meek says, "What of the ideal of certainty itself? If I must accept as true only those claims of which I am certain, what about the claim that I must accept as true only those

claims of which I am certain? Am I certain of it? What reasons would I use to prove it? The ideal does not even meet its own standard. It is a claim of which I cannot be certain. We might say that it is an expression of faith.”<sup>1</sup>

Might say? It is absolutely an expression of faith. She’s just being nice. To say you can’t know truth is *to know a truth*. It’s a position that argues against itself.

How do we know what is true about God? The only way limited human beings can know anything about an limitless God is if this God reveals himself to us.

That is the question — has the God of this universe made contact with us or not? The Christian claim is that God has revealed himself to humanity, beginning with his historical dealings with the nation of Israel, which we have documented in the Old Testament — and culminating in the historical works of his Son, Jesus Christ, which we have testimony of in the documents of the New Testament.

God verified his word to the people of Israel by foretelling his plans for them and then

bringing those plans to pass. And he also foretold the coming of what would happen in the New Testament in the life of Jesus. His final verification is the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

This is why every philosophy and religion, no matter how great or small, must deal with Jesus Christ, because he is the most influential Person who ever lived. The most plausible explanation for his influence in the world is that he actually rose from the dead. Otherwise, you have some unschooled fishermen who changed the world with either their lies or their confused perspective of reality. That’s more difficult to believe than the resurrection itself.

When your view of reality contradicts the Bible’s view of Jesus, you have to reconcile Jesus with your worldview somehow, because Jesus himself said, “I am the Way and the Truth.” Christ is the embodiment of Truth the same way that ignoring the claims of Jesus Christ are the embodiment of ignorance.

We could actually examine the rest of this list in light of the Person of Jesus because he is

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<sup>1</sup> Meek, (p. 34)

**the embodiment of all that is honorable, just, pure, lovely, etc. He is truly worthy of praise.**

**Now, one of the points the Lord makes through the Apostle Paul in this letter is that our actions begin with how we think.**

**He writes:**

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

**Then he adds:**

What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me  
—practice these things

**Notice the progression here.**

**First, we learn the Truth. But it's not enough to just learn the Truth about Christ, which is really learning a new way to view the world. We have to receive what we have learned. That means we have to accept it.**

**The most common way to learn something is by hearing it. That's why the Lord tells us in Romans:**

**Romans 10:14**

**14** How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?

**But Paul didn't just preach the truth. He lived the truth. This means the way he lived his life corresponded to the reality of the world as set forth in God's Holy Word.**

What you have learned and received and heard and *seen in me*  
—practice these things

**The reason you can practice these things, the reason you can apply the truth of the Bible to your life is because it works in real life. And you'll find it not only works in real life, but when you live in opposition to reality as God has defined it, things often go badly. Relationships break down, you're unhappy and you make those around you unhappy, work is unfulfilling, life is unfulfilling, etc.**

**How you think about Christ effects what you think about yourself which in turn effects what you think about others which in turn effects how you treat them.**

**Matthew 11:19**

Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds.”

The wisdom of the Christian life is justified (declared to be good) by how it is lived. The world doesn't owe a debt of gratitude to science for the creation of hospitals. Science and technology have become useful tools to healthcare. But hospitals began because Christians cared for the untouchables the way their Lord cared for them. Christians cared for the sick because Jesus cared for the sick. That is the undeniable historical root of hospitals.

The Church is the largest single provider of healthcare and education in the world, working especially in some of the poorest countries where there is no other care available.

Education for the masses is not the result of secular thinking applied to life. It is the result of Christians who wanted common people, boy and girls and dads and moms, to be able to read the Bible. They understood it shouldn't just be for the privileged.

In 1948 the UN put forward the declaration of human rights. These rights were so clearly based on Christian principles that some Muslim states objected and refused to sign

on that basis because it conflicted with Sharia law. Karl Marx also acknowledged that human rights were a product of Christianity, which is why he rejected them. Well-known atheist Jurgen Habermas stated that, "human rights is the direct legacy of the Judaic ethic of justice and the Christian ethic of love."

Caring for orphans and widows — if you think these are just practices of human decency, well, my friend, they are not. In the Middle Ages, abandoning unwanted children finally surpassed killing them. Destroying unwanted children is not a modern invention. But it was preached against, so unwanted children were left at the door of church. This practice gave birth to the first orphanages.

Why do we bury people in the ground? This isn't the result of pragmatic thinking? The pagans burned their dead. The early Christians buried their dead as a witness to the resurrection, that these bodies would one day be raised to glory.

All these things and so many others are simply the result of Christians who are following Christ by applying this Word.

Wisdom is justified by her deeds.