

| **Philippians** |  
Week 11 Scripture Guide | Philippians 4:8-9

**Biblical Context**

In Philippians 4:1-9 we see a string of commands from Paul on things that the Philippians were to do. We've discussed some of these earlier, but this passage ties very closely in with 4:6-7. "Do not be anxious," Paul commands us in 4:6, "Instead, in every situation, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, tell your requests to God."<sup>1</sup> By coming to the Lord in prayer, we receive peace from God in Christ Jesus, a peace that sets a guard over our thoughts and emotions so that we don't get tossed around by our anxieties, worries, or fears.

**v.8** We see in Philippians 4:8 an instruction to think of "whatever is true, whatever is worthy of respect, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if something is excellent and praiseworthy."<sup>2</sup>

By examining the words in Greek we're able to see with a larger scope exactly what we're to focus on:

- True - from ἀληθινός (alēthinos) - also meaning faithful; real; genuine; valid; trustworthy
- Honorable - from σεμνός (semnos) - also meaning worthy of reverence and respect
- Just - from δίκαιος (dikaios) - also meaning righteous, upright, pertaining to justice
- Pure - from ἀγνός (hagnos) - also meaning holy, chaste, sincere
- Lovely - from προσφιλής (prophilēs) - also meaning to be fond of; pleasing; loving what is good; having brotherly love
- Commendable - from εὐφημος (euphēmos) - also meaning avoiding ill-omened words, religiously silent, fair-sounding, auspicious, gracious
- Excellent - from ἀρετή (aretē) - also meaning virtue, excellence of character, praiseworthy act
- Praiseworthy - from ἔπαινος (epainos) - also meaning to express approval, recognition<sup>3</sup>

By saturating our minds with such things, we're able to more quickly step into the presence of God moment-by-moment. Conversely, when we set our minds on things that are not of God, we are more easily susceptible to the world, our flesh and the devil. All this to say, setting our minds on things of God requires diligence. Dr Tony Evans says in his commentary of v.8:

"God gives us peace, but we must hold onto it...one of the reasons we don't keep our peace is because we tend to dwell on the things that are set in opposition to the peace we're asking for. We mull over a lie or over bad things that could happen. And if we continue to entertain messages that work against our peace, anxiety will soon return. We must, therefore, ask ourselves if we are able to praise God for the things that we are dwelling on. If we can't, then we'll soon lose the peace God has given us."<sup>4</sup>

**v.9** So how do we determine what is true, worthy of respect, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent or praiseworthy? Paul lifts himself up as an example in verse 9. "And what you learned and received and heard and saw in me, do these things." A few things to point out. First, Paul doesn't hold himself up as an example often, but only with those churches he himself planted. Second, this is not a boastful statement on Paul's end, rather because he makes much of Jesus in his life, he wants more of Jesus for the Philippian church. Third, it should be noted that Paul's command to the church to follow his example

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<sup>1</sup> *NET Bible*. Thomas Nelson, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> It is interesting to note, according to the *South Asia Bible Commentary* (full citation in footnote 4), that "lists of vices and virtues like this one are found also in other ancient writings, and it is likely that that was a factor in Paul's selection of these terms."

<sup>3</sup> All pulled from the *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*

<sup>4</sup> Evans, Tony. *The Tony Evans Bible Commentary*. Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2019. 1246.

would have been a typical form of teaching for rabbis at the time - lessons are often better caught than they are taught. Jesus' rabbinical method of teaching is another example.<sup>5</sup>

Finally Paul calls the church to not only think about the things of God and look to him as a godly example, but to practice (πράσσω) the things of God as well. In other words, love of God and others is not simply abstract, theoretical ideas to think about but fleshes itself out through obedience to God and service to others.

### **Connection and Application**

Paul is instructing us to take our anxieties to God the Son in prayer, and then focus on the Son and rest in His peace rather than looking at our circumstances that quickly lead to anxiety. We focus on the Son through learning from Scripture from the guidance of the Spirit, with help from those who are further along in the faith than us.

Notice as well the connection between thinking, practicing and peace. For Paul, “to think on such things” is then carried out through action, only when we make this connection will we experience the God of peace. In other words, it is not enough to simply think about God, even if those thoughts are biblically sound. The true “test” is whether those thoughts then move us to Christ-likeness as we set our minds towards deeper love for God and others. Elsewhere Paul makes similar statements of how biblical knowledge ought to lead us to obedience (2 Timothy 3:16-17 and Titus 2:11-12). On the flip side, Paul warns against those who may have knowledge but don't carry through with loving obedience as “nothing” in 1 Corinthians 13:2.

By keeping our focus on Jesus Christ, by dwelling on those things that are true, worthy of respect, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent and praiseworthy, by learning from others, and practicing these things, we cultivate the space within us to be at peace in Christ Jesus.

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<sup>5</sup> To cite Robert Coleman from *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, ““Having called his men, Jesus made a practice of being with them. This was the essence of his training program—just letting his disciples follow him.”