

Broomfield



PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH MINISTRY OF THE WORD

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Engage the Culture

Steadfast Christianity. Part 8

Make Us a King

In 1051 BC, God's people, true to God's promise given to Moses almost 400 years earlier¹ were asking for a king. Yet, they made a huge mistake. Rather than asking for a king who would learn the "fear of the Lord," study God's word, rule according to the will of the Lord, and long to know the Savior they wanted a king like the nations.

1 Samuel 8:5, "And said unto him, Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: **now make us a king to judge us like all the nations.**"

Brothers and sisters, God gave His people their request and sent a king JUST LIKE the nations. This was a king who ruled according to his own will. He was a king who served for his own profit and welfare. He was a king who killed his own countryman. He was a king who ordered foreign mercenaries to murder some of God's own priests!

From this account we learn an important lesson. The lesson isn't that Saul was a poor example of a king. But that as a people redeemed by God, it is possible still to have a love-affair with this world.

And we like the people in Samuel's day we often find that we want our lives to be much "like the nations." When it comes to our families, we want marriages like the nations where equality and independence are stressed. We want children like the nations where self-expression and popularity are valued above knowing God and being faithful to His covenant. When it comes to our churches, we want preachers like the nations where how they speak and look is more important than whose they are and what they say. We want Bible studies like the nations where the focus is on becoming a better person. We want worship services like the nations which are exciting, contemporary, and appeal to the modern ear. When it comes to our relationship with Christ, we want a religion like the nations where what we do and say has the ability to merit God's approval.

Our love-affair with this world runs deep. And thus one of our greatest problems as a church today is that rather than being a people who are "in the world and not of it"² we have become a people who are of the

¹ Compare Deuteronomy 17:14-20

² Compare John 17:15-16

world and not in it. Rather than being “the salt of the world”³ and thus serving as an agent of preservation in our society, we have become more like a sponge as we absorb the world's standards, ethics, morals, and entertainments.

Consequently, there is perhaps no more relevant message today than the exhortation that Paul gave the Philippians. In the context of the conflict between Euodias and Syntyche, Paul turns his focus to the disciplines that would make for peace in the life of the steadfast Christian. The discipline that we are looking at is that of a proper thinking.

Think on These Things

Philippians 4:8, “Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, **think⁴ on these things⁵.**”

The key word here is *think*. It implies that this should become a characteristic of life. We have seen the word before⁶ and if you have done much study in the book of Romans you will be quite familiar with this word.⁷ The idea behind this word goes way beyond simply the entertainment of thoughts. It refers to the reaching of a settled conclusion by careful examination and study. In other words, Paul says “I want you to be a scientist when it comes to life. I want you to examine the world; put it to the test and those characteristics or qualities which are lasting, hold up and remain in and through all things lay hold of them.

This is such an important exhortation! Paul has just spent four chapters speaking of himself and the Philippians in terms of persecution and trial. It would be easy from this to conclude that the world is evil. It would be easy to say that we ought to just bury our heads in the sand, grin and bear whatever the world throws at us, and wait for Christ's glorious return. After all, our citizenship is in heaven,⁸ the garrison to which we look for security and comfort is the Lord,⁹ and the community that is of any account is the church body.¹⁰

However this is the mentality of the “escapist,” not the child of God. For we know that this is our Father's world. He is the ruler and owner of all things. Accordingly, our call is NOT to bury our head in the sand. We are to tend the garden! We are to co-reign with Christ! We are to “rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth” (Genesis 1:28).

When it comes to living in this state of sin and misery, we are called to embrace the best of the world, as long as it is understood in the light of the cross!

Yet, this is where it gets “dicey.” For to take this exhortation and apply it half-heartily, truly is to become worldly. And thus we must be very careful what we esteem in our hearts/minds as praise-worthy.

³ Compare Matthew 5:13

⁴ λογίζομαι logizomai

⁵ ταυτα tauta

⁶ Compare Philippians 3:13

⁷ This term is used 18 times in Romans

⁸ Compare Philippians 3:21

⁹ Compare Philippians 4:7

¹⁰ Compare Philippians 1:27

Proverbs 23:7 (paraphrased), “For as [a man] thinks within himself, so he is.”

The idea here is not that if you simply think a thought, you will reflect that thought in your living. Rather, we are speaking here of a deliberate reasoning which arrives at a conclusion which thus becomes a way of life. Thus we read these words:

Proverbs 27:19(NASB) “As in water face reflects face, so the heart of man reflects man.”

That which is in your heart —that which is there on account of reasoned analysis — will come out. If you are selfish, that eventually will be reflected in all you do! Accordingly, we are cautioned to “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life” (Proverbs 4:23).

That is the point! Every one of us has a grid through which we filter the “stuff” of this world. Rather than denying that we ought to filter the world through a grid, Paul exhorts us to “watch over our heart.” He says to take the things of this world, put them to a test as to their merit, and then actively appropriate into our lives that which remains as virtuous.

Family of God, this is the key to being in this world, yet not being of it! However this is very difficult for us to do today. During the twentieth century, the church transitioned from a mission's-minded outlook to a isolationist outlook. It went from longing for the world to be saved to longing for the world to get out of the church. Accordingly, throughout the 1970s to 1990's we saw the emergence of a Christian sub-culture. This sub-culture developed Christian T.V., Christian music, Christian school, Christian clothes, Christian novels, Christian soap operas, Christian games, Christian beauty supplies, Christian pens and pencils, Christian bracelets, Christian advertising books, and Christian Sport's Teams.

The reasoning on the part of the many in the church was that if you can remain isolated from the world, you'll be pure and you won't have the problems of the world. However this is a farce.

“Where does evil reside?” In the world? In records? In music? In a beat? In clothing? Or in our heart?

Matthew 15:17-19, “Do not ye yet understand, that whatsoever entereth in at the mouth goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the draught? But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.”

Today, though we are isolated as a church, nevertheless the sin that dwells within our hearts continues to do its work such that we are losing our youth by the droves. Abortion in the church is that of the national average. Divorce is at a higher rate in the church than in the world. Our worship services resemble a Las Vegas show. Our pastors are washing out of the ministry in alarming numbers. New approaches to “church” are popping up all over. And many have grown bored of Christ!

Family of God, it is time to take back this world! It is time for us to cast aside the mentality of the isolationist of which all of us are an heir. We need to take the things of this world, put them to a test as to their merit, and then actively appropriate into our lives that which remains as virtuous. Yet, this will require a standard against which to measure this world.

Our Standard: Truth

Philippians 4:8, “**Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.**”

While Paul clearly reflects a heart willing to engage the world around him, he wasn't worldly. Rather, by inspiration, he gives us the grid, lens or filter through which God would have us filter this world. Notice the grid.

The first item mentioned is whatever is true¹¹ Our society tends to think of “truth” as that which is able to be proven and does not contradict the law of non-contradiction. And this is correct. Yet in the Bible, the word for *true* is far more than something that is proven. It represents that which constitutes *reality*.

When Christ said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6) He was saying far more than simply “I don't lie, try proving it” but that He constitutes reality. Thus, if you want to know what “real” life is it is not living in sin or indulging the flesh but it is living in Christ!

When Pilate asked Christ “what is truth” (John 18:38) he was not asking for a math lesson but was wanting to know what constitutes reality. Accordingly in Scripture, that which constitutes reality, that which is eternal and will last beyond the grave is wrapped up in God,¹² the gospel,¹³ and the word.¹⁴

Thus the first filter by which we process this world is, “Does the reality portrayed contradict what we know about God or the gospel?”

Our Standard: Honest

The second item is honest or honorable¹⁵. In our use of this word, we readily agree that there is a relativity built into it. Such is not the case in Scripture. The word for *honorable* references that which is revered or praise-worthy in the context of the Kingdom of God.¹⁶ For example, because Epaphroditus almost gave his life for the gospel Paul exhorted the Philippians to “hold men like him in high regard” (Philippians 2:29).¹⁷

This is the idea behind the term *honorable*. From the perspective of what constitutes reality —God and the gospel ministry — that which is *honorable* is whatever we recognize as being praise-worthy, or worthy of emulation.

The second filter or question by which we process this world is this: Is it something which from the perspective of the Kingdom we ought to emulate?

Our Standard: Right

¹¹ αληθης alethes

¹² Compare Romans 1:18-25

¹³ Compare Galatians 2:5 and Galatians 5:7

¹⁴ Compare John 17:17, and Psalm 19:9, 119:151

¹⁵ σεμνος semnos

¹⁶ Compare Proverbs 8:6-7

¹⁷ Compare also 1 Corinthians 11:1

The third term is just or right.¹⁸ When this word is used of God, this word references the fact that God's actions are in perfect agreement with His nature and character. God will never do anything that would be inconsistent with who He is. Everything He does in our life is consistent with His holy, loving will.

The words, *right* or *righteousness*, when used in this context, references anything in accordance with the standard of right established by God's character. From this we derive our third filter which is this: Does it contradict what God Himself would approve?

Our Standard: Pure

The fourth of our terms is pure.¹⁹ The setting of worship is where this word originated. Things set apart for use in the temple were considered to be pure, undefiled, or free from sin. Thus this term has to do with whatever is not tainted by evil.

The Hebrew writer exhorts us to let “the marriage bed kept pure” (Hebrews 13:4 NIV). This is the idea conveyed by purity. It references any good thing that is not corrupted or distorted by evil thoughts, motives, or desires. The fourth filter by which we process this world is this: Is it corrupted by an evil thought, desire, motive, or act?

Our Standard: Lovely

The fifth of our terms is lovely.²⁰ This word is used only once in the Bible and means acceptable or pleasing. It is derived from a word that means that which is treated affectionate or kindly. In the context of the Kingdom it would be considered as lovable or something we should love. Thus, as we consider that which is *lovely* we examine and so emulate that which evokes love or pleasure in the Kingdom.

The fifth filter by which we process this world is this: Is it something from which we ought to derive satisfaction as Kingdom citizens?

Our Standard: Good Report

The sixth our term is good report or repute.²¹ This references any conduct which would be spoken well of by the child of God. Simply put, the filter here by which we process this world is this: Is it something Kingdom citizens would commend?

Our Standard: Excellence

The seventh term is virtue or excellence.²² This is any act or thought that would be endorsed by God and which is lauded by God Himself as being good or commendable. With this Paul gives us a final filter which was designed to cover what the previous six words may have missed. In essence what we have here is a final, simple test: Would God Himself embrace it? Would God participate in it? Would Christ endorse it?

¹⁸ δικαιοσ dikaios

¹⁹ αγνοσ hagnos

²⁰ προσφιλησ proshiles

²¹ ευφημοσ euphemos

²² αρετη arete

Biblical Thinking: Worldview

Now when this list is combined, we have here a grid or filter by which to interact with the world. Don't misunderstand that the use of this filter is not for the purpose of determining what is sinful. Scripture has already spoken about what is sin. Rather the purpose of this filter is to reveal to us that which is virtuous and so worthy of emulation.

The questions we must ask, as we are bombarded with choices, acts, or attitudes commended by society in books, movies, advertising and the like, are these: Does the reality portrayed contradict what we know about God or the gospel? Is it something which from the perspective of the Kingdom we ought to emulate? Does it contradict what God Himself would approve? Has it been corrupted by an evil thought, desire, motive, or act? Is it something from which we ought to derive satisfaction in the Kingdom? Is it something Kingdom citizens would commend? Would God Himself embrace, participate in, or endorse it?

Now it should be obvious, but this list requires us to do more than be entertained or to passively sit by and experience the world. We can't just sit in the pew and let another decide these issues. Rather we must think and reason from the Scriptures about what we do. We must evaluate God's mind and will, and so filter all of life accordingly. We must be a Berean believer.²³

Of course this goes against the grain of modern day Christianity. Many today want us to focus on emotion and pragmatism rather than ask questions like these: Is it true? And what does God think? Rather they want us to focus on these questions: Does it work? How does it make me feel? Dr. John MacArthur wrote this:

“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 feeling 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 romanticize the faith, making the local church into an experience center... Their concept of “church” is that they are spiritual consumers and that the church's job is to meet their felt needs.’”²⁴

It is easier for the minister to simply tell you to run from everything in this world. It makes people feel better when they bury their heads in the sand. And it is easier to hope that the Rapture will come and solve all our problems. This is why the church becomes occupied with things it labels as “Christian” activities. For example some of the things that churches do in our community are these things: Youth groups, fellowships, retreats, outreaches, study groups, Christian media, etc.

The call of our passage is a call to arms! It tells us to gird up our lions! Take, read, understand and study the word of God in our hands. All for the purpose that we might cultivate a worldview by which we may engage and enjoy the world God created.

Biblical Thinking: Church view

And that brings us to a very important closing observation based on the context of Philippians 4:2, 3.

²³ Compare Acts 17:11

²⁴ Dr. John MacArthur, Commentary on Philippians, page 285-286

Heretofore we have examined this passage as if it were without a context. We have shown how we ought to process the things of this world which view for our attention. We have discussed which acts, attitudes, and activities we ought to emulate. And these are great questions because we must ask them as pilgrims in this land.

However, this passage rests in a context. Recall that Paul here is addressing the disciplines which lead to peace in the body of Christ. And while it is fine to interpret this passage broadly in reference to interacting with our world, we nevertheless **MUST** consider these exhortations in reference to disunity or conflict in the body of Christ. And perhaps, this is the most valuable of the applications to this passage.

In Philippians 4:2-3 Euodias and Syntyche were not getting along. And we know that it wasn't on account of doctrinal differences or moral failure for Paul would have addressed these issues head on. The message that Paul gave to them simply was, "Get along!" So from this we concluded that the issue was more akin to a conflict in personality — which itself could lead to sin, but was not sin in and of itself.

Paul exhorted them to embrace a certain worldview, and this worldview is delineated in verses 4-9. So when we come to verse 8 we read this:

Philippians 4:8, "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."

The primary interpretation of this passage must be in the context of conflict in the body of Christ.

From this perspective what ought we to do when we find ourselves at odds with another Christian in the body of Christ? What ought we to do when we find ourselves at odds in our marriages such that we are in a serious disagreement? What ought we to do when we can't get along with another individual?

Should we check our minds at the door? Should we just sit in the pew and listen and then leave?

No, we must first guard our hearts such that we do not think upon anything about the other person that is slanderous. Rather we need to think on whatever is true in the other person, honorable in the other person, right in the other person, pure in the other person, lovely in the other person, of good repute in the other person, as there is excellence and praise-worthy activities on the part of the other person **WE MUST LET OUR MINDS DWELL ON THESE THINGS!** Alec Motyer put it this way:

"If, in a difficult relationship, we allow our minds and judgment to be clouded by half-truth, or if we allow frivolous and damaging thoughts about the other person to simmer in our minds, we are hardly being like Christ. We should rather determine to think only the truth about the other person, to value what is attractive and praiseworthy about him."²⁵

Our thoughts do matter! Though all the world may not know what you are allowing your minds to meditate upon when it comes to another person, the truth is "As in water face reflects face, so the heart of man reflects man" (Proverbs 27:19).

Lest we find ourselves sinning against the peace that Christ died to create we must "Watch over [our]

²⁵ Alec Motyer, BST, Philippians, Page 212

heart with all diligence” (Proverbs 4:23). And thus seek to bless the other person beginning with what we think about them.

What do you call a person who outwardly serves, builds up, compliments, and encourages yet all the while is thinking slanderous thoughts about the very one(s) he is serving? The Scriptures call him a “noisy gong or a clanging cymbal” (1 Corinthians 13:1).

Let us guard our hearts knowing that “from it flows the springs of life” (Proverbs 4:23).

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About the Preacher

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