

You Are What You Think

Introduction (Text: Philippians 4:8-9)

- A. The body of evidence grows almost daily, yet every person has to learn the lesson for himself: *we are what we think*.** Sour dispositions create not only sick souls but also sick bodies.
- B. Feelings of worthlessness, bitter resentment and self-pity diminish us to fragments.** A possessive nature, self-indulgence, self-protectiveness, and self-centeredness shrivel the soul, create dysfunctions within us, distort perception, blur perspective, and prevent any healing we need.
- C. The opposite of this is also true.** Those who fill their minds with positive affirmations, who concentrate on the noble virtues that make life meaningful, set the stage for healing and make possible the wholeness that is God's design for all. Two thousand years before psychologists were teaching this truth, Paul discovered its power. **“Think about such things,”** he said—**“things that are noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable. We are what we think.**

#1: We Are What We Think

- A. There is a hospital for children in Tiburon, north of and near San Francisco, called “The Center for Attitudinal Healing.”** It concentrates on cases of children suffering from traumatic diseases or from severe accidents that have disabled them.
 - **It is a remarkable place with a unique philosophy. Rather than the children simply being patients, or victims needing professionals to attend them, the children are encouraged to take responsibility for their own healing and that of the other children.**
 - As a result of this philosophy, a community of love and concern which brings healing has developed. A newspaper article about the hospital quoted one of the responsible persons there as saying,

“We feel that much healing takes place by asking the simple question, do I want to have peace of mind, the peace of God, or do I want to experience conflict? If we want to experience peace of mind we will choose to extend our love to others and experience the love extended to us. If we want to experience conflict we will want something or want to evaluate why we're not getting it.”

- The purpose of the hospital is to stimulate attitudinal healing that enables the children to triumph over their adversity. The center has a marvelous saying,

“If you can help somebody else you’re not disabled,” and is a modern institutional witness to the fact that we are what we think.

B. So powerful is this truth that it must but kept in perspective. The list in verse 8 is not unlike a catalog of virtues one could find in the writings of Greek moralists.

- If this verse is taken in isolation, we have no more than the great virtues of pagan morality, but Paul was urging the Philippians not to ignore their value.
- That is a challenge to Christians of any age—we must never be **“less good”** than those who make no claim to being Christian. At the same time, we must make no claims to a **“superior goodness”** as a basis for our salvation.

C. There is still another huge lesson here. How we use the dynamic power of our thinking determines whether it is “Christian” or not. Almost our total culture reflects a perversion of this power.

- The **“power of positive thinking”** is the biggest tool suggested to make us millionaires, to turn us into self-serving people bent on satisfying all our desires. Thus we have a consumer economy of indulgence and waste.
- It is not arrogant, I think, for Paul, as he calls people to meditate on the great virtues, to add, (v. 9). **You cannot separate what Paul said from the style of his life and his passionate commitment to Christ as Lord of his life.**
- The Christian can never use with integrity **“the power of positive thinking”** (Philippians 2:5, 7, 8).

D. For Christians, what we think must always have the shape of the Cross about it. A young girl, upon walking into the church and seeing for the first time the Cross on the altar, asked her father-preacher, Joseph Cotton, **“Daddy, what’s that plus sign doing up there?”**

- Bishop Melvin Wheatley set the description of the Cross as a plus sign over against what he called the most distasteful description of the Cross he ever heard: **“The cross symbolizes the ‘I’ crossed out,”** said Wheatley, **“That description implies that the Cross is a minus sign.”**
- **I submit to you that the Cross does not symbolize the minus sign but the plus sign—not the ‘I’ crossed out but the ‘I’ stretched out—reaching down into the ground of being, up into the infinity of becoming, and out toward as many others as it can touch.**

Note: What does this mean for us about the movies, television programming, and even social media for Christians? You are what you think. As Christians, we should not be contributing to the world’s very negative outlook on life. In any activity of these things, we need to ask ourselves: Is it true? Is it noble? Is it right? Is it pure? Is it lovely? is it admirable? Is it excellent or praiseworthy?

Also, realize that Social Media can be positive. (Ex: Prayer requests sent out. Positive words that can be very encouraging!)

Parents, watch what your children are involved with on television, their music, movies, and their social media contacts. Be warned!

Christians, what kind of example are we leaving on our social media? You are what you think!

#2: *The Sufficiency of Christ and the Support of His People (Philippians 4:10-23)*

A. The closing section of this letter is a marvelous witness to the sufficiency of Christ and the support of His people for each other. There is nothing systematic about the statement. It is personal, flowing out of the deep well of Paul's love and appreciation for the Philippians, and the trust and confidence he has in the all-sufficiency of Christ which was not to be superseded by anything else.

- He has already referred twice to the gift he has received (**1:5; 2:25-30**) which was the primary stimulation for writing the letter. But he waits until the end to express himself fully. It is obvious that Paul has difficulty doing what he wants to do—express adequate thanks for the support he has received through the years from his friends.
- All sorts of thoughts and emotions flood his mind and heart. How can you adequately say thanks when the gift comes from people who can't afford it? The church in Philippi was poor and through the years, with other Macedonian churches, had given beyond their resources.
- **How can you be a gracious receiver when your material needs and wants are so few? Paul does the best anyone could do—expressing gratitude in a low key, enough to prevent his friends from thinking he needs more; then in a high key, enough to cause them to realize that he remembers all their past generosity and rejoices in their continuing affection.**

B. Shining through this collage of emotion, love, sensitivity, commitment, and appreciation is a picture of the people of God supporting one another, materially as well as through prayers. There is a beautiful description of this in **2 Corinthians** where **Paul talks about the Macedonian churches, of which Philippi was one (2 Corinthians 8:1-5).**

C. Sprinkled throughout this section are some verses that capture signal truths.

#3: *We Have Amazing Coping Powers*

- A. Viktor Frankl spent years in a Nazi prison camp where persons were subjected to subhuman and antihuman treatment that threatened annihilation of decency, of the worth and dignity of persons, as well as their physical being. Out of that experience Frankl developed a psychotherapeutic process called *logotherapy* and wrote an inspiring and meaningful book entitled: *Man's Search for Meaning*.
- B. From his death camp observations, he documented the amazing coping powers of humans to retain inner freedom. He wrote:

“We who lived in concentration camps can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last pieces of bread. They may have been few in number, but they offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way.”

- C. **This last inner freedom, the freedom to choose one’s own way, gives us an amazing capacity to cope. Paul witnessed to it: (Philippians 4:12-13).**
- D. As we face our everyday lives, let’s think about these things. After all, you are what you think.