

# **Truth for Today**

*The Bible teaching radio programme*

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For reply: Email: [truthfortoday@aol.com](mailto:truthfortoday@aol.com)

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**Speaker:** Mr. George Stevens

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## **Are you eating healthily: Food for thought - Philippians 4:8**

In the musical “*Oliver*”, we find the workhouse boys imagining food. Their song includes the words:

*Food, glorious food!  
Hot sausage and mustard!  
While we're in the mood  
Cold jelly and custard!  
Pease pudding and saveloys!  
What next is the question?  
Rich gentlemen have it, boys -  
Indigestion!*

Today, we are considering a different kind of food, namely, the spiritual food that should engage the thoughts of Christians. Food is necessary for growth and energy. Yet, before either of these can occur, the food has to go through the process of digestion. It is the same with spiritual food. Not only is it read or heard, but it must be “chewed over” and prayed into the soul. In this way, the behaviour of Christians will be energised for God. They should desire truth as much as a baby desires milk. The teaching may relate to basic Christian understanding or to the deeper truths of Bible. The kind of food depends upon the spiritual maturity of the believer. In the context of the verses to be considered today, we are being encouraged by the apostle Paul to consider a number the things to which we, as Christians, should give continual attention.

Let's read Philippians 4:8-9. “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. Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you.” These verses act as a plumb line that measures the uprightness of our Christian lives. They both search and test us. In Psalm 139:23-24, we find a prayer of David to that effect: “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”

The Lord not only knows those of us who are His, but He knows them better than they know themselves. However, He has given us the tool of Philippians 4:8-9 in order that we may make a true evaluation of ourselves as Christian men and women. In fact, the Greek word for “think” in our context literally means “to take an inventory”. This is not merely a listing of items, but also an assessment of their value.

The first things we are asked to consider are **those that are “true”**.

This word refers to things that are wholly true and open with nothing being concealed. It is truth without doubt, whereas a “theory” is thought that makes a suggestion or hypothesis, but it is surrounded by doubt. Unfortunately, many scientific theories are taught or accepted as fact. One such theory is that of Evolution. Christians are not to be taken up with such theories in a general way. They can only lead to a totally wrong understanding of human kind and, of course, may seek to displace God Himself. Christians should be concerned with things that they have proven to be true.

The Lord Jesus claimed to be the way, **the truth** and the life. A close examination of the historical records of His life will prove that He is indeed the Son of God. Therefore, all that He has revealed is true, because He is the faithful and true witness. When He declares that God the Father has a house where a place is prepared for His church, then we can rejoice in this. In fact, this gives us an example of His openness. We read: “In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you” (John 14:2).

When He declares that God is able to ruin both soul and body in Hell, then we accept that Hell is a real place or condition in which the resurrected wicked have their place. This principle is confirmed by John 1:9 that states Jesus was the true Light which lights every man that comes into the world. Furthermore, in John 8:16, Jesus revealed that His judgment was true. When we turn to 1 John, we find: “And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is

the true God, and eternal life” (1 John 5:20). Other scriptures reveal that the Lord Jesus Christ is both holy and true. For examples, see Revelation 3:7-14 and Revelation 19:11). Many of the scriptures quoted were written by John, supported by the apostles, who speaks of his witness as being true (John 21:24). Of course, God is described as “true” also. The Thessalonians who received the Gospel of Christ turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God. This emphasises that there is one God. He is the genuine article. Now, some people say that there is no absolute truth. If that is the case, then human beings are spiralling downwards morally into a pit of self-destruction, because they have no recognised standard of behaviour to live by. However, if the main meditations of Christians are focussed on God and His Son, then their lives will reflect *their* standards.

Other items are listed in the New Testament as being true and therefore, worthy of consideration. For example, we find the “true grace of God” in 1 Peter 5:12. Christians stand in this grace. Like the waves of the ocean, this divine favour both surrounds and caresses the believer in Jesus. In fact, it may be better to say that we “dwell” in this grace because it is all-pervasive.

We also find a “true heart” in Hebrews 10:22 where we are invited into the presence of God Himself: “Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.” What a privilege!

Again, in Ephesians 4:24, we find that the new man (the nature we have as Christians by new birth) is created after God in righteousness and “true holiness”. All these deserve our attention, as does the word of God itself. As to secular things, Christians are to concentrate on those that are true. Whether, they contemplate TV or radio programmes, books or magazines, DVDs or videos then the items should be factual rather than fictional. What a challenge in this day and age!

The second things to which we are to give thought are **those described as “honest”**.

The word literally means “honourable” or “venerable”. So they are things that are worthy of trust and of the highest respect. Older male Christians should behave in such a way that they are revered in this manner (Titus 2:2) as should deacons and their wives (1 Timothy 3:8-11). Of course, our holy God must be so revered along with the sinless Christ.

However, we are encouraged to think about things that are worthy of this awe. The Lord Jesus told some of His day to consider the lilies, noting how they grow. He said, “...They toil not, they spin not; and yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these” (Luke 12:27). There are many things in nature that are breath-taking. As we marvel at their beauty and design, we have to remember our Creator. It is the same when we gaze at the order and beauty of the universe. Our thoughts are brought back to the power and divinity of the Creator. We may then go further and find that it was the Son of the Father’s love by whom all things were created. They were created by Him and for Him. He is both the Maker and the Possessor of all things. He should therefore receive the glory and respect He deserves as such.

In Job 37:14 we read some good advice, “Hearken unto this, O Job: stand still, and consider the wondrous works of God.” When we trace through Scripture, we find the works of God outlined. Just think about the ten plagues that were brought in judgment upon Egypt so that God could redeem His people. They are awe-inspiring! When it came to the plague of lice, pharaoh’s magicians had to declare, “This is the finger of God” (Exodus 8:19). Even the wrath of men had to give God honour. If we simply looked at the seven signs of the Gospel according to John performed by Jesus, then we would have to declare Him to be the Son of God.

Today, we only have to consider the birth of a normal baby to be struck with awe. It reminds us that we are fearfully and wonderfully made. Here the word “fearfully” means that it causes a deep sense of “reverence” in our souls.

The third adjective we need to think about is **“just”**.

This means “equitable” and has the idea of a person or thing being “suitable”, “righteous” or “holy”. We can immediately look at the Lord Jesus as being just and God being both just and the justifier of those who trust in His Son. As the Lord Jesus is holy in nature, then His acts are always righteous. The same applies to God Himself. To be just is more than being innocent. The Lord Jesus Christ was the One who kept the Law of God to perfection. He was sinless, loving righteousness and hating iniquity. In Acts 3:14, Peter addresses the Jews saying, “But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you...” So the Jews rejected the Christ preferring Barabbas, a thief and murderer, instead.

In Matthew 27:24, we find that Pilate believed Jesus to be a just man. We read, “When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it.” The righteousness of Christ is emphasised in 2 Timothy 4:8. It reads: “Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.” Furthermore, in Revelation 15:3 we

find that the ways of God are just: “And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints.”

This is confirmed by Psalm 145:17, “The Lord is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works.” Yet the wisdom of His ways is past finding out for we read in Isaiah 55:8-9: “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.” Therefore, we can see the ways of the Lord to some degree by studying the Bible records. We can see how He trained Moses for forty years in pharaoh’s palace and for forty years as a shepherd in the wilderness in order to lead God’s people for forty years in the wilderness. We can see how He in His sovereignty worked in the life of Joseph to bring about the blessing of Israel. We can see His ways in the salvation won by the sacrifice of His own Son. Any ways that are just and right deserve our consideration as Christians.

The next things for us to think about are classed as “**pure**”.

In the scriptures we find the following are described as pure: hearts, consciences, water, religion, wisdom, a river and minds. We only have time to consider a couple of these items, but they are all worth thinking about.

In Matthew 5:8, we find: “Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.” Among other things, the heart is the seat of the will and expresses love. However, Jeremiah reminds us that the Lord described the human heart as deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. So how can sinful hearts be made pure? The answer lies in the death of Christ. Because the Lord Jesus suffered for sin at the cross, God is faithful and just to forgive sins and cleanse the believer from all unrighteousness. A pure heart is one that has been cleansed by the blood of Christ. Christians are to follow righteousness, faith, love and peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart (1 Peter 1:22). Are you concerned that such things are not being followed in your church? Then God’s will is clear for you - leave it! Depart from unrighteousness! Rather, gather with those who do call upon the Lord out of a pure heart. Linked with this, Christians are to love one another with a pure heart fervently. If we did this then the world would recognise us as disciples of the Lord Jesus.

1 Timothy 3:9 encourages us to hold the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. When Adam sinned, he then had knowledge of good and evil. This is conscience. However, it is one thing to have knowledge of good, but do we have the power to do it without the help of God? We may recognise evil, but can we resist it alone? The conscience of an unbeliever has deteriorated since the fall of Adam. It is now described as being “defiled”. A pure conscience comes with the new nature when we are born again through the Spirit and the water of God’s word. We are to keep the faith once delivered to the saints in this pure conscience. It was also with a pure conscience that Paul was able to remember and pray unceasingly for Timothy. He also told him not to partake of other men’s sins, but to keep himself pure.

James gives us a description of “pure religion” in James 1:7. It reads: “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.” What a religion this is! It is one that takes care of the fatherless and the widow. How do we measure up in this? Do we support orphanages and homes for the elderly and other linked charities? In this pure religion we also have to keep ourselves pure from the wicked influences of the world system that opposes God. How? By walking according to His revealed truth in the New Testament. Unfortunately, many Christians act according to the fads, fashions and opinions of this world rather than in obedience to the word of God. They will say that it is society that has changed. They do well to use this excuse for society has changed. Its standards have declined to a level of corruption, violence and sin that brought judgment upon the world in Noah’s day. This begs the question - are we occupied with things that are pure, or do we revel in the disguised depravity of television soaps, films and the like?

We are then to consider **things that are “Lovely”**.

The word means “pleasant” or “agreeable”. It links well with the previous word for we find, “The words of the pure are pleasant words” (Proverbs 15:26). These are words that encourage and strengthen us as believers in Christ. This is confirmed by Proverbs 16:24 that tells us pleasant words are “as an honeycomb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones”. Psalm 147:1 says that it is a pleasant thing to sing praises to God and that praise itself is becoming. Christians are a people of praise! We have so much for which we must thank God. It is praise that binds us in one heart and purpose, therefore, we find it a pleasant thing for brethren to dwell together in unity. There is the unity of the Spirit that cannot be broken; but we need to endeavour to keep it in the joining bond of peace. Let us truly love God and one another!

The wives of believers are to be compared to the loving hind and pleasant roe in Proverbs 5:19. This love between man and wife is an agreeable consideration as it represents the love between Christ and His church. How we are touched by the verse that tells us Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it! How we marvel at the words of the bridegroom (typical of Christ) in the Song of Songs: “Thy love is much better than wine.” How much the Lord appreciates our love no matter how fickle or failing it may be.

David was a fugitive hiding in the hills and caves when he confidently wrote the words of Psalm 16:6: “The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage.” It was the language of faith. He knew that he had been anointed by Samuel to be the King of Israel. Therefore, he appreciated all that God was going to do for him as well as for that He was to give Him. We can count our blessings also. We can think about the wonders of our salvation as found in the book of Ephesians. We can look forward to the joys of eternity and the peace of the father’s house. These things delight the Christian’s God-given nature. In what do you seek delight and pleasure? A football or cricket match? A carnival? An opera? What, I wonder?

Next, we need to consider **items that are of “Good Report”**.

There are a number of people in the New Testament who are commended because of something that characterised them. For example:

- the centurion, Cornelius, was well reported of because he was just and God-fearing (Acts 10:22);
- Ananias, a Christian, was commended because he was “a devout man according to the law” (Acts 22:12);
- In Hebrews 11, we find a list of people commended for their faith; and
- Demetrius received commendation because of his obedience to the truth.

Therefore, some of the things of good report include: a reverential fear of God, a just character, devotion to God, faith in practice and obedience to God.

We must now explore the word “**Virtue**”.

The word literally means “manliness”, but can mean “excellence”. We find the word used by the apostle Peter. In 1 Peter 2:9, we read: “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light...” Here the word for “praises” is “virtues” or “excellencies”. The excellencies of God may be seen in His moral attributes. These include: love, holiness, righteousness, faithfulness, goodness, mercy, compassion and kindness. This forms a list of things that accumulate in the word “virtue”. And what a study they would make!

Yet, even more amazing is the fact that we have been called to glory and virtue. 2 Peter 1:3 reads: “According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue...” Furthermore, in verse 5 of the same chapter, we find, “And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge...” Virtue is the expression of faith in lives that reflect Christ. This shines out in the works of Christians who, like Christ before them, should be engaged in doing good.

In Proverbs 31:10-31, we read of the qualities of a virtuous woman. Her energy, attitudes and works put us to shame. Yet, they are things that we should think about. The end of the chapter says, “Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised. Give her of the fruit of her hands; and let her own works praise her in the gates.”

The verse leads us to our final consideration. It is the word “**Praise**”.

This refers to things that are “worthy of honour”. The works of the virtuous woman brought her praise. The works of Dorcas in the New Testament brought her commendation from the widows. In Psalm 34:1, David wrote, “I will bless the Lord at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth.” The Lord should be praised because of His mighty acts, His faithfulness, mercies, compassions, righteous judgments, blessings and so on. But what other things are to receive honour in this way?

There are many things that stir up praise in the Bible. Here are few of them - clustered under the Greek word meaning “to covet the honour”:

- Studying to be quiet, doing our own business, and working with our own hands (1 Thessalonians 4:11);
- To be well-pleasing to the Lord (2 Corinthians 3:9); and
- Striving to preach the Gospel where Christ has not yet been named (Romans 15:20).

I have heard it said, “We are what we think!” This is an accurate statement. So, let’s think on these things and be more like our Lord Jesus Christ.

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