

Truth for Today

The Bible explained

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Some Bible Lists: Things to think about

Good morning. We are continuing with our series on "Some Bible Lists" with a consideration of Philippians 4:6-9. Today's talk is entitled 'Things to think about'. In our home, lists are an essential feature of family life. I was introduced to this indispensable feature on the day after our honeymoon. I soon realised that I had been extremely fortunate to survive life prior to marriage without having a list to govern the essentials of daily living. This important and life guiding feature has been passed down to our children and now has an impact on an increasing circle of people.

Bible lists are much more life changing for the Christian, as I trust we will see in this third talk of this series.

Let us read the relevant verses from Philippians 4: *"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy - meditate on these things. The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you"* (Philippians 4:6-9).

Background

In Acts 16, where Paul and his companions are guided by the Holy Spirit to leave Asia and journey into Europe (Acts 16:6-12) they are directed to the city of Philippi in Greece (Acts 16:12). It is here that Paul encounters godly women praying by a riverside and he has the opportunity to speak to them (Acts 16:13). It is recorded in this chapter that a business woman, named Lydia, has her heart opened by the Lord (Acts 16:14). She believed and was baptised along with all in her house (Acts 16:15). So great was the transformation in Lydia that she opened her home to give Paul and his companions lodging while staying in the city (Acts 16:15). Hospitality is a feature of Christian fellowship.

During my lifetime as a Christian, I have found that fellow believers, whom I had never met in person before, were happy to invite me and my family into their home. Sometimes this was for a meal and at other times for a few days. As a family, we were just as happy to respond in the same way as opportunity presented itself.

Paul and his companions, especially Silas, soon discovered that preaching and resisting the devil, was not always easy. This eventually resulted in the authorities apprehending them and having them beaten (Acts 16:22). Then, to compound matters, they were given an overnight stay in the security wing of the local prison with their feet in stocks (Acts 16:23). Was this a disaster? No, it gave opportunity to Paul and Silas to witness to all the inmates. They sang praises to God (Acts 16:25) and the prisoners heard them. But at midnight an earthquake occurred (Acts 16:26) which eventually resulted in the jailer accepting Christ as his Saviour and Lord along with all in his house (Acts 16:30-34).

This was the start of a long friendship with the Christians at Philippi. Paul in his care for believers, would revisit places where he had been instrumental in establishing an assembly of believers. But Paul also used correspondence when circumstances made it difficult to achieve a visit. It is from Paul's letter to the Philippians that we have today's subject. Although there are only four verses as today's topic, Philippians 4:6-9, they are full of encouragement and challenges. We will consider each verse in detail.

A Christian's Privilege (Philippians 4:6)

Let us remind ourselves of Philippians 4:6, *"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God."*

The antidote to being anxious is prayer. The commencement of Philippians 4:6 states *"be anxious for nothing."* Alternatives to the word anxious are: nervous, worried, concerned, uneasy, apprehensive, restless, fretful, fearful, frightened and troubled. We are sometimes told that there are people who are naturally anxious about everything and anything. For the Christian, especially in certain countries, we can understand how they would be anxious. Persecution, warfare, famines, homes devastated, being a refugee, unemployed and no doubt many more situations

and issues could cause a believer to be anxious. What were the Christians at Philippi suffering from? I mentioned earlier that Paul on his first visit ended up in prison. Prison in those days was not the comfortable environment of many such institutions in our country! Yet Paul is saying to them, and by extension to us in 2016, do not worry. Paul turns their attention to the resource of prayer.

Paul stressed the need to bring all our requests by prayer and supplication to God, (Philippians 4:6) whether they are small or great issues. Prayer is the general unfolding of all the concerns that we have and within that prayer the specific supplications or pleadings for resolution for those issues that are causing distress to ourselves and maybe others. Prayer does not necessarily bring about an immediate and quick fix. It can do. But what we must remember is that our loving God and Father has under His control all the circumstances that appear detrimental to Christians. The fix will come when it is the right moment in the ways of God. When we pray, we need to be conscious of doing so in the will of God. Therefore, Paul states that, as we pray, let it be with thanksgiving. Why thanksgiving? Thanksgiving would imply that we will be happy with God's answer, whether we fully understand that answer or not!

Mr. Scriven's hymn, "What a friend we have in Jesus" is very much in line with prayer and supplication in times of adversity. Let us read from his hymn:

*What a Friend we have in Jesus,
All our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry
Everything to God in prayer!
Oh, what peace we often forfeit,
Oh, what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer.*

*Have we trials and temptations?
Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged;
Take it to the Lord in prayer.
Can we find a friend so faithful,
Who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness:
Take it to the Lord in prayer.*

*Are we weak and heavy-laden,
Cumbered with a load of care?
Precious Saviour, still our refuge,
Take it to the Lord in prayer.
Do thy friends despise, forsake thee?
Take it to the Lord in prayer;
In His arms He'll take and shield thee,
Thou wilt find a solace there.*

(JM Scriven 1819-1886)

The Peace of God (Philippians 4:7)

Let us read Philippians 4:7 again, "*and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*"

We are told in Romans 5:1 that we have peace with God because we have been justified by faith through the Lord Jesus Christ. Judicially we have been forgiven and set free, no longer under the condemnation of a holy God. Here Paul is speaking about God's peace in relation to the issues that cause believers distress. Notice that Philippians 4:7 is the second half of the sentence which commences in Philippians 4:6 with, "*be anxious for nothing*". We are now introduced to "*the peace of God*."

Paul states that this peace is beyond our understanding. How does it work in all the distressing circumstances in which Christians are immersed? Well, this peace addresses all the emotions and concerns that come from our hearts and minds. Primarily we know that our salvation makes us secure not just in time, where all the troubles are, but also for eternity. We also know that the God who holds the universe in place can and will deal with our difficulties. Therefore, we are reminded that this peace comes to us because of Christ Jesus. Our Saviour who brought us this great salvation is the risen Man in the glory who intercedes for us today. It is this peace of God which comes, like an

impregnable fortress, to protect our heart and minds. Therefore, all the distress that originates in the heart and mind is calmed and we are reassured by God's peace. This is the secret of a victorious Christian life, going on serenely with the peace of God through the storms of life.

Eight Things to Meditate Upon (Philippians 4:8)

Let us read again Philippians 4:8, *“Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy - meditate on these things.”*

In Philippians 4:8 we have a number of qualities that Paul is encouraging the Philippians to be occupied with, that is to give serious consideration to what occupies our minds.

a. “Whatever things are true”

The first phrase to consider is *“whatever things are true”*. We are not to be engrossed with error, that which is wrong, contrary to God's word and detrimental to a believer's faith. There is so much error in the world which seeks to undermine the truth of God's word and to cause Christians to founder on the rocks of unbelief, doubting the reliability of the word of God. Consider Jesus who said of Himself, *“I am the Way, **the Truth and the Life**”* (John 14:6).

b. “Whatever things are noble”

Next we have the phrase *“whatever things are noble”*. Noble or honourable are the things or persons that have a good reputation and can be looked to as a good example. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 11:1, *“Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ”*, see also Philippians 3:17. As Paul had Christ as a role model, he exhorted the Corinthians to do the same. The Philippians were to be followers of the Lord Jesus Christ and, as Pilate said of Him, *“I find no fault in this Man”* (Luke 23:4), so let the world say that of believers!

c. “Whatever things are just”

The phrase *“whatever things are just”* would remind us to consider just or right things. The Lord Jesus is described in 1 John 2:1 as *“Jesus Christ the righteous.”* He is also the one who is the advocate with the Father to help restore failing saints of God when they sin, 1 John 2:1. Primarily we again look to the Lord Jesus and meditate upon Him. But, in a secondary sense, we need to focus on right things in this world. This world has turned the divine standards that are found in the scriptures upside down. So what was once considered right is now considered wrong and what was once considered wrong is now promoted as right. As a result, people are losing sight of what is sin and the fact that it is intolerable in the sight of God. The consequence of this world's doctrine of the reversal of standards is that it clouds the reality of a coming judgement and accountability to the supreme Judge.

d. “Whatever things are pure”

Let us consider this next phrase, *“whatever things are pure”*. The word 'pure' has at its base the thought of what is holy, clean, chaste or unsullied. It is well known that whatever we watch, read or hear will have an impact on the mind. I think almost without exception that the individuals who have gone on a killing spree in a school, town or somewhere similar have been found to be occupied with violent information, often for months beforehand. Although not many will admit to the link, it seems fairly obvious to the “man in the street” and to the families of the victims. So Paul exhorts the Philippians to consider holy things. Let us remember that the Philippians lived in a society that was depraved even by the standards of today. The Roman Empire crumbled as much from the morally corrupt society that was rotten to its core as from the outside enemies which attacked its borders. Peter writes in his first epistle, 1 Peter 1:16, *“Be holy, for I am holy”*. This is quoted from Leviticus 11:44-45, Leviticus 19:2 and Leviticus 20:7 where God stresses His holy nature and He expects His people to be a holy people. What was true then, Peter states must also be true in Christians today. We have a holy God, a holy Saviour and the Holy Spirit who lives in us. Therefore, in every aspect of our lives, we too are expected to be holy.

e. “Whatever things are lovely”

Our next phrase is *“whatever things are lovely”*. The word 'lovely' can be described as 'acceptable' or 'pleasing'. Here we are encouraged to be occupied with what will please our Lord. It is to present our lives as a living sacrifice, as Paul stated in his letter to the Romans: *“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service”*, Romans 12:1. Our whole life is to be a living sacrifice in service to God. Nothing should be held back but every aspect should reflect the grace that has saved us. For those who enjoy typology, you might like to consider the Song of Solomon 5:16, where the Shulamite

describes her Bridegroom as *“altogether lovely.”* Would we not identify with the same sentiments as we consider the beauty of our Lord Jesus Christ?

f. *“Whatever things are of good report”*

Now we have the sixth phrase, *“whatever things are of good report.”* We are not to be occupied with gossip, scandal and that which is detrimental and damaging, whether true or not. The *“good report”* are things that are profitable and healthy, words which help saints to grow and become strong in their faith. I am not saying we avoid information which informs of intolerable situations in other countries, or even our own. This would initially demand our prayers and possibly to be followed up by giving of our time and/or resources to alleviate the hardship suffered by so many people, often children. As Paul states in Galatians 6:10, *“Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.”*

g. *“If there is any virtue”*

Let us consider the penultimate clause, *“if there is any virtue”*. Virtue could be rendered moral goodness or excellence. The previous six phrases considered are challenged in this and the next clause as to whether they are worthy of consideration. Are the things previously considered worth doing so? Is it morally and spiritually right for Christians to act in this way? We need to challenge our hearts as to whether or not we respond in our lives to Paul’s *“Finally, brethren”* challenge. Are we involved and maturing as Christians? Moral goodness and excellence was found in our Lord Jesus Christ, God the Father declared His satisfaction in His beloved Son. Although fully man in this world He was a man without sin. We gain our inspiration by looking up and consider Jesus but as we look around we seek to represent our Lord in this sad sin stricken world.

h. *“If there is anything praiseworthy”*

Our last clause in this verse is, *“if there is anything praiseworthy”*. ‘Praiseworthy’ could be translated as ‘commendable’. Paul obviously thought that he was bringing before the Philippians commendable, thought provoking issues. He challenges them to give due consideration to what he is writing. If the answer is ‘yes’, and Paul expects them to come to this conclusion, then he states, *“meditate on these things”*. These precious verses that we have considered are part of Paul’s legacy to the Philippians, but not only to them, it is a legacy to us also.

Paul the Example (Philippians 4:9)

“The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.”

In our final verse, Philippians 4:9, as we consider this Bible list, we come to a number of startling statements. The first is that the Philippians were not unaware of what Paul was saying to them in this letter. *“You learned and received”* these things when I was with you. So this Bible list is a reminder and indeed a refresher course in the truth that they already knew. Further to this, he reminds them that they *“heard and saw”* these very things in Paul while he was with them. The Philippians had no excuse; it was not something new. So Paul states forcibly to them - *“these do”*.

How many times do we read the Bible or listen to godly Bible teachers and what we take in goes straight into the head but never reaches our hands and feet? Christianity is all three, head, hands and feet. Learning comes first, practice or doing is intended to follow. We are expected to live out what we are - believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. The world can only see the Lord as He is displayed in our lives. We hold to God’s holy word, every word of it, and we should live with the same care and concern that our Lord Jesus Christ demonstrated in His life while down here in this world.

The last clause in this verse is a divine promise. As we are faithful to this ‘Bible list’ then *“the God of peace will be with you”*. Philippians 4:7 reminded us that we can have the peace of God to guard our hearts and minds in all the anxious times of our Christian life. Now in Philippians 4:9 we have a greater promise that the God of peace Himself will be with us in life’s journey.

To Conclude

As I have meditated on these verses I have observed the following impact upon myself:

- They are clearly words of encouragement and also words of challenge.
- We live in a world where we can be anxious about many things, issues that touch us personally as well as the more distant issues of the plight of fellow believers in other parts of the world.
- How much do I experience God’s peace in a world that knows nothing of true peace?

Paul seeks to instruct believers on having their minds and heart occupied with what is spiritual and therefore profitable. This is the challenge I leave with you this morning. As I close, I am reminded of Paul's words to Timothy, *"Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus"*, 2 Timothy 1:13.

Thank you for listening, and may the Lord's richest blessing be upon you.

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