

Think on Truth

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[0 : 00] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on the 6th of February 2005. The preacher is Tim Johnson. His sermon is entitled Think on Truth and is based on Philippians chapter 4 verses 8 and 9.

It's knocked down and a hole gets dug in the bathroom for the spa and all the trees and grass gets removed from the backyard but then it stops. And that was two years ago when all of that took place and the renovation rescue team has to come out.

In that case great ideas, great thinking, great vision and a flurry of activity at the beginning but it doesn't result in ongoing action. Great thinking not backed up by ongoing action.

Well today's Bible passage wants us to avoid both of those problems. It contains two commands, one in each verse. One in verse 8 you see there. Think about certain things.

And there's a command in verse 9 as well. Keep on doing certain things. Think and keep on doing. And those two things are dependent on each other.

[1 : 16] Because the Bible realises that what we think is important. Because what we think shapes what we do. But thinking on its own is not enough. We not only need to think but we need to put into action.

We need to keep on doing. To act out as well. So think and keep on doing. Those are the two commands that the Apostle Paul gives to the Philippians.

In what they think about and in their actions. They need to concentrate on things that are good in themselves. But also beneficial to others.

Well let's have a look at verse 8 first of all. And what Paul encourages about thinking. Now you might notice if you have a look at verse 8. Where you have the words think about in your Bible. There's a footnote. And if you have a look at the bottom of the page. You see that the word think about has the meaning of taking account of. So we're being told his command is not just about thinking happy thoughts.

[2 : 15] It's deeper than that. Being told to weigh things up. To deeply consider things. To take account. That's the thought of thinking that is being commanded in verse 8.

Taking account of deep thinking. Not light thinking. And there are six things that we're directed to. In terms of focusing our thought life. Whatever is true.

Whatever is honourable. Whatever is just. Whatever is pure. Whatever is pleasing. And whatever is commendable. And it's worth us going through those. Each one quickly.

And thinking about what they mean. In terms of our thought life. What does it mean for us to think about. Whatever is true. Well to think about what is true.

Is to think about what is real. Rather than that which is mere appearance. That seems to be real. But is not. Now truth is very underrated these days.

[3 : 11] In recent years. In the West. People have said that there is no such thing as absolute truth. And really whatever for an individual is their own truth. Well that's truth for them.

And that's okay. But that's not the Bible's view of what is true. The Bible believes in ultimate truth. Because ultimate truth is based on God.

God is real. And God made the world. And he made people in a particular way. So what is real and true. Ultimately. Is what is consistent with God.

And consistent with the way that God created the world to be. There are things that we see in life. Particularly if we turn on the television set. Which claim to be true and real.

But they're not consistent with God. And they're not consistent with the way that God created us to be. And created this world to be. In which case they are mere appearances.

[4 : 08] They claim to be real. But they're not. It's like the difference between a bowl of fake fruit. And the real thing. The bowl of fake fruit. It might look very real.

But it will provide no nourishment at all. And we're presented with a lot of fake fruit. If you turn the television on. We're shown apparently the reality of human relationships.

The reality of the importance of wealth and money. The reality about beauty. But that is not the truth. It might be common.

It might be what a lot of people do. But it isn't necessarily true and real. From God's perspective. And it's easy for us to be shaped by these things. Rather than actually to be shaped by the truth. Which comes from God. But no. We're told here. Think about what is true. Not just what is mere appearance. We're also told to think about what is honourable.

[5 : 08] And what is honourable. Is that which is worthy of respect. Something which people hold up as a high standard. The opposite of that which is kind of crude. Or in the gutter.

Or vulgar. So Paul is urging. Thinking up high. Thinking about things which are honourable and worthy of respect. Rather than spending our time thinking about things that are down in the gutter and low.

Think about what is honourable. We're also to focus our thoughts on what is just. And justice is about things being done the right way. Being done the right way by God's divine standards.

But also being done the right way relationally. It's a very relational word. Treating people fairly. Relating to them properly. Doing what is right.

What is just. What is fair. Rather than what is unfair. Or selfish. Paul says focus your thoughts on what is just. What is right. Rather than what is unjust.

[6 : 07] We're also to think about what is pure. Pure. Purity. Is about that which is untainted. Untarnished. By sin or evil. If we're to think about what is pure.

Then that is going to involve thinking about pure actions. But also pure thoughts. And even pure motives. It's very easy isn't it. For each of those things. Actions.

Thoughts. And motives. To become tarnished by sin. Very easily. Because sin gets into things. And corrupts them. But we're told here. No. We need to focus our thoughts.

On what is pure. I think ultimately. That's going to lead us. To consider God. Isn't it? Because one of the key characteristics. Of God. Is purity. Or holiness. God is the only one.

Who is truly holy. All his actions. All his thoughts. All his motives. Are pure. And we are to deeply consider. That which is pure. Therefore God's character.

[7 : 04] Is going to be a key focus. For our thoughts. But also. Where. By God's grace. There is something of purity. In human actions. And human thoughts. Then we're also.

To deeply consider those as well. Think about. These things. We're also to think about. That which is pleasing. And this is actually. A very general term.

That which is pleasing. It's something which commends itself. By its intrinsic attractiveness. Or agreeableness. It can be about. Moral good works. But it can also be.

About things like. A beautiful piece of music. Or perhaps something beautiful. In creation. We might ask ourselves. Well. Why are we being commanded. Here to think about.

Things like this. Why are we being commanded. To think about things. Which are pleasing. Or attractive. Well I think. It's because we're being reminded. That these things. Come from God. The good creator. See the things.

[7 : 56] Things that are truly attractive. Genuinely attractive. And pleasing. Not because of our greed. Or our lust. Or other parts of our sinful nature. But things that are genuinely.

In themselves. Pleasing and attractive. So. Because God created them that way. God made the world good. He gave us good things. For us to enjoy. True.

The world has been marred by sin. But as we look at the world around us. We see things. That still reflect the good. That God made the world to be. And God wants us to enjoy them.

And he wants us. To think about those things. In order to remind us. That he is a good God. Who made it all. And finally there. We're to think about. What is commendable. That is things which are worthy.

That people speak well of. Things that are likely to win people. Rather than cause offence to people. Things that are commendable. We're to focus our thoughts.

[8 : 54] On those as well. So there's six things. That are to form the focus of our thinking. What is true. What is honourable. Just. Pure.

Pleasing. And commendable. And to sum all that up. Paul says. If there is any excellence. And if there is anything. Worthy of praise. Think about these things. We're being commanded here. To not waste our thoughts. On things that are not excellent. On things that aren't worthy. Of our thought life. But to focus on the really good things. Things that reflect God's character. Things that reflect the good world. That God has made. Think about. These things. In many ways. That's easy for us to apply. Isn't it? I mean. We don't go away from verse 8. Wondering what. God would have us do. It's quite clear. We need to think. About certain things. But how do we ensure. [9:51] That we do it. How do we ensure. That we actually do. Think about the things. That we've been told. To think about. Ponder them. And weigh them up. Well it strikes me. That two things. Are necessary.

Firstly. Having the time. To think. And secondly. Ensuring that we have. The right input. To our thoughts. Life can be so busy. That we don't actually. Have time to think. I know that for myself. When life is very hectic. And there's lots of tasks. That need doing. I almost. Fred at times. That I don't have time to think. Because I'm so busy. And if we're constantly doing things. Constantly active. How can we deeply consider. What is true. What is honourable. What is just. How can we. Set aside time. To do that. Well we need to make sure. That we do. Have time to stop. We need to. Be proactive. About setting aside time. To be quiet. Quiet with God.

[10:48] And quiet. To think about. What is true. Honourable. Just. Pure. Pleasing. And commendable. And it won't happen. By ourself. Because life gets busy. We need to make sure. That we're setting aside time. In order to think. About these things. Knowing that. What we think about. Shapes. Our actions. But the second thing.

That we need to think about. Is our input. Where does our input. Come from. For our thinking. Where are we going to find things. That are true. That are honourable. That are just. Pure. Pleasing. And commendable. So that we can think about them. Well it's true. That we observe things. In this world. That meet these criteria. And where we do. We should think about those things.

And I think that's a key thing. That this passage is saying to us. Where we see these things. In the world. We are to think about them. And weigh them up. That's going to involve. Critically analysing things.

[11:42] To see whether they are actually true. Not just mere appearance. Whether things are pure. Rather than tainted. By sin. And ultimately. We have to do that.

Against God's standard. Comparing them. With what God has revealed against. About himself. What God is like. We should test them. Against God. As the standard. But also.

In terms of our input. Where better. To find things. That are true. And pure. And pleasing. And honourable. Than in God's word. Itself. Because that is where God reveals.

What he's like. And what he's done. And that is where we will find. These things most clearly. But that leads us on. To verse 9. You see in verse 9. There's a further command.

Not only. Does Paul say to the Philippians. That they are to think certain things. But they're to keep on doing certain things. And you notice there. That they are to keep on doing. The things that they have learned. And received.

[12:36] And the things that they have seen. And heard. In Paul. Two pairs. I think there. Things that they have learned. And received. Focusing on what they've been taught. And the things that they have heard.

And seen. Focusing on the example. Of the apostle Paul. And the command is. To keep on doing these things. And it's not separated. From what's just been spoken about.

In terms of the thinking. Thinking and doing. Go hand in hand. And they're not supposed to be said. Against each other. In fact. It would seem. That the Philippians. Have been told. To focus on.

The things to think about. And then hopefully. The things that they have learned. And received from Paul. And the things that they have seen. And heard. Are the very things. That have just been spoken about. A demonstration.

Of the true. Of the honourable. Of the just. The pure. The pleasing. And the commendable. Well let's look at those two pairs. What has been learned. And received. And what's been heard.

[13 : 31] And seen. Firstly. The Philippians are told. To keep on doing. What they have learned. And received. That is. The things that they have been taught. By the apostle Paul. He took the gospel message.

To Philippi. As we read. In the book of Acts. And he explained to them. No doubt. The death of Jesus. And the resurrection of Jesus. And what they need to do. In response to it. Giving their lives to Christ. And following him. And throughout the. The letter. Of. To the Philippians. That we've been looking at. Over the last couple of weeks. We see that in the letter. Paul is following up. His ministry. He's reminding people. Of the gospel. And he's telling them. Live your lives. In a manner. Worthy of the gospel. Of Christ. That's a key phrase. In the book of Philippians. Live your life. In a manner. Worthy of the gospel. Of Christ. Well that's the things. That they have learned. And received. Isn't it? That's what they need. To keep on doing. That's what Paul has told them.

[14 : 26] And that's what they need. To keep on doing. To live out the gospel. Live consistently with it. And be the people. That God wants them to be. But secondly. They are to do the things.

That they have seen. And heard. That is. They are to follow the example. And keep on doing. The things that they've seen. Paul do. Paul's not afraid. To hold himself up. As a. As a godly example. And say. Follow me. And it's not boastful. And it's not arrogant. For him to do it. And he doesn't want the Philippians. To just mimic him. Without thinking. But what he is saying to them is. As I follow Christ. Follow me. Where you see me following Christ. Use me as a walking. Talking example. And put those things into practice.

In your own life as well. It's very helpful. Because they could see someone. Who is living out the gospel. And they could imitate him. And do it themselves. I went yesterday.

[15 : 20] To the ordination ceremony. Of the new deacons. Timothy and Rod McArdle. And Tim Patrick. And others. And Paul Barker. Gave the address. To the new deacons.

And one of the things. He said to them was. In ministry. It is not just about doing. It is also about being. The person who you are. The example.

The way you live your life. Is very important. Because people watch you. And they will follow. The example that you set. Ministry. Is about being. As well as doing.

And earlier in Philippians. In chapter 3. Verse 17. Paul has made the same point. The Philippians are to imitate him. And others. Who live out the gospel. They are to put into practice. What they see in others.

As people follow Christ. So we see. As well as thinking right. We need to make sure. That we keep on doing. What is right as well. The two must go hand in hand. It's true.

[16 : 15] That what we think about. Shapes the way that we act. But we also need to act. We need to do the things. That we've been taught. In the Bible. And we also need to. Live out.

The gospel. Imitating those. Who are putting it into practice. Again. To apply these verses. Is not difficult. The command is there for us. Keep on doing these things. The question is. How do we make sure.

That we keep on doing it. Firstly. We need to make sure. That we keep on doing. What we have learned. And received. When Paul spoke to the Philippians. They had learned. And received the teaching. From him.

But of course. We have the teachings. Of the apostle Paul. And the other apostles. And the prophets. Faithfully recorded for us. By God's sovereignty. In the Bible. We have learned. And received. What has been handed down. In the Bible. And so. We need to. Keep on doing it. We need to put it into practice. Not just. As a one-off. But we need to keep on doing it.

[17 : 09] That's what we heard about. In the children's talk. Earlier today. It's not just about listening. The foolish builder. Listened. But he didn't put it into practice. So the challenge. For us. Is.

What we have learned. And what we have received. What we hear in the Bible. We need to keep on doing it. Not just listening. But doing. But in addition. We also need to put into practice.

Those things. That we see. And hear. In others. As they faithfully. Follow Christ. We have the example of Paul. And others in the Bible. But that's one of the beauties.

Of church. As well. As we gather together. As God's people. We see. And we hear. Other people. Following Christ. Who can be an example to us.

In our own lives. Christian leaders. Yes. But also. Other people. In the church. We need to come to church. With our eyes. And our ears open. To see the way.

[18:01] That people are. Living out the gospel. The way that people. Are following Christ. And we need to imitate each other. As people follow Christ. I can say. That as a younger person.

In the church. It is a great privilege. To be part of the church. And to see people. Who are more mature than I am. Who have been Christians longer. And who have more life experience. Than me. Living out the gospel. And being able to imitate them. As they live out the gospel. People who have been married. For many more years than me. Living out the gospel. In their marriage. People who have had more life experience. Than me. Living out the gospel. In their life. Through different experiences. Good and bad. Again. As we come to church. Let's come with our eyes. And ears open. To see people. Following Christ. And where we see it. To imitate that. Not uncritically. But weighing it against the Bible.

[18:55] Walking. Talking examples. Of what it is. To model Christ. Well the last thing. In our passage this morning. Is a great promise. And it's a great one. For us to close with as well. As we focus our thoughts.

On what is true. Honourable. Just. Pure. Pleasing. And commendable. And as we shape our actions. According to what we hear in the Bible. And what we see in the example of others. Living out the gospel.

We're promised. That the God of peace. Will be with us. The intention here. Is that at an end. Of a set of instructions. Which can be very hard. To put into practice. We're given.

Both an assurance. And an encouragement. We've been given tasks to do. We need to get our thinking right. And we need to get our actions right. But we're not doing those tasks alone.

We're not left to our own devices. To just do it. We're promised that the God of peace. That is. The God who gives. All good blessings. And is the source of every good blessing.

[19:50] Is with us. God is with us. Helping us to think right. God is with us. Helping us. To keep on doing the things. That we've been taught. And the things that we see.

Modelled in others. The God of peace. Will be with us. As we seek to do these things.

Strengthening us. And protecting us. Praise God. For his great provision to us.

Amen.