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Godly Thinking

4: 7-9

Godly thinking DIG: What kind of peace does ADONAI give? How can we focus on what is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable or praiseworthy while in a world of immorality and corruption? Is godly thinking “being positive” or “thinking positive thoughts?” What are the eight virtues that, as believers, our minds should focus on? How stable are you in your spiritual walk?

REFLECT: How can we have a built-in “radar” for detecting wrong thoughts? Do you feel like you are one of the eight virtues, which one are you doing the best at? Which one do you need to work on? Who do you pattern your life on? What evidence is there that you are spiritually stable? In what ways are you experiencing the peace of God? How are you an example to others?

Spiritual stability is a result of how a person thinks.

The question naturally arises as to how **Paul’s** command to **stand firm** (**to see link click [Bl](#) - Stand Firm in the Lord**) was to be applied. **His** answer, introduced by the phrase **in this way**, unfolds in **verses 2-9**. **He** lists **seven basic, practical principles** that lead to spiritual stability: **(1)** living in **harmony (4:2-3)**, **(2)** maintaining a spirit of **joy (4:4)**, **(3)** maintaining a **gentle spirit (4:5a)**, **(4)** being **calm** in every situation **(4:6a)**, **(5)** reacting to problems with **prayer and petition (4:6b)**, **(6)** thinking about **godly virtues (4:8)**, and **(7)** obeying **God’s** standard **(4:9)**.¹⁷⁵

Paul now provides the result that comes from making our **requests known to God (4:6b)** . . . **the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Messiah Yeshua (4:7 NIV)**. As we noted in **1:2**, the word **peace** (Greek: *eirene*) in classical Greek means *to bind together*, in the B’rit Chadashah, the operation of **God’s grace** is binding the believing sinner to **God** and **His** life. **Paul** drew on the deep meaning of **shalom**, meaning *peace*,

*wholeness, or security in the TaNaKh.*¹⁷⁶

This **peace** comes from **God Himself**; and as such, it differs from that which **the world** offers (**First John 2:15-16**). It is the inward tranquility of the soul granted by **God**. It is a confident trust in **His** flawless wisdom and infinite power that provides calm amid the storms of life. **Isaiah** wrote of this supernatural **peace**: **You will keep in perfect peace all who trust in [ADONAI], all whose thoughts are fixed on You (Isaiah 26:3)**. **Paul** prayed for **the Romans** that **the God of hope [would] fill [them] with all joy and peace in believing (Romans 15:13)**. In his high priestly blessing on Isra'el Aaron said: **May ADONAI lift up His face toward you and give you peace (Numbers 6:26)**. In **Psalm 29:11** **David** wrote: **May ADONAI bless His people with shalom!** Shortly before **His** death **Yeshua** promised: **What I am leaving you with is shalom - I am giving you My shalom. I don't give the way the world gives. Don't let yourselves be frightened (John 14:26)**. However, **God's peace** is not for everyone. **The Ruach Ha'Kodesh**, speaking through **the prophet**, tells us that **there is no peace for the wicked (Isaiah 48:22)**.

Paul further defines this supernatural **peace** as that **which surpasses all understanding**. It exceeds all human intellectual powers, human analysis, human insights, and human **understanding**. It is superior to human scheming, human devices, and human solutions, since its source is the **God** whose **judgments** are **unsearchable** and whose **ways** are **unfathomable (Romans 11:33)**. Since it is a supernatural work, it resists any human **understanding**. The real challenge for us is not to eliminate every trial; it is to trust in the good purpose of our infinite, holy, sovereign, powerful **God** in every difficulty. Those who honor **Him** by trusting **Him** will experience the blessings of **His** perfect **peace**.

When this **peace is realized** in our lives, **ADONAI will guard** us from anxiety, doubt, and worry. *Phroureo* (**will guard**) is a military term used for soldiers on guard duty. This picture would have been familiar to **the Philippians**, since the Romans stationed troops in **Philippi** to protect their interests in that part of the world. Just as soldiers guard and protect a city, so **God's peace guards** and protects us who confidently trust in **Him**. **Paul's** use of the phrase **your hearts and your minds** was not intended to imply a distinction between the two; **he** was merely making a comprehensive reference to our inner person. Once again, **Paul** reminds us that true **peace** is not available through any human source, but only in **Messiah Yeshua**.¹⁷⁷

The peace of ADONAI referred to in this verse is often misunderstood to be a warm fuzzy feeling that **God** promises to give, especially in the midst of making difficult decisions. Consequently, we hear the expressions, “I had a real **peace** about it,” or, “I didn’t have a **peace** about it.” Not only do these expressions misuse **Philippians 4:7**, but it’s a poor and biblically-baseless way to make decisions. **God** often calls on **His** people in **His Word** to do things about which they have no subjective warm fuzzy feeling, such as sharing the Gospel with a neighbor or denying ourselves sinful pleasures.



(6) Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true (4:8a NIV): The word **finally** indicates that **Paul** has arrived at the climax of **his** teaching on spiritual stability. With the concluding appeal **(4:8-9)**, **the apostle** focuses on putting into practice what **he** has taught and modeled for **the Philippians**. To enable us to better understand the basic idea of the verse, we will first focus on the file’s most basic command. The principle that **Paul** is about to relate is both the summation of all the other commands and the keys to implementing them. The phrase: **think about these things (4:8j)**, introduces an important truth: spiritual stability is a result of how a person **thinks**. **Paul** is calling for **the Philippians** to consider, ponder, or let one’s **mind** dwell on **these things**. What **Paul** has in **mind** when **he** speaks of **these things** is a list of **eight virtues** that, as believers, our **minds** should focus on.

First, whatever is true (4:8b Greek): Simply put, **Paul** calls **the Philippians** to set **their minds** on reality. At the same time **he** is stressing that we should not dwell on those **things** that are false. There is no embrace of **things** that are **true** without an accompanying rejection of **things** that are false. This call to **think about things** that are **true** is rooted in the fact that **ADONAI Himself** is **truth (Deut 32:4; Isaiah 65:14)**. **Yeshua Messiah** refers to **Himself** as **the way, the**

truth, and the life (John 14:6) because **His** is the fullest embodiment of **grace and truth (John 1:17)**. So, an obvious application of the command to set our **minds whatever is true** (Greek: *alethes*) is to set our **minds** on Scripture, and **Messiah Himself**, who is **the Word (John 1:14)**.

But it seems unlikely that **Paul** intends to restrict this concept to **God** or **His Word**, since the literal translation of **the apostle's** words would be *whatever things are true*. Thus, **he** broadens the scope of anything that is true. And focusing on **the things** that are true is essential in the struggle to follow **Messiah** in this fallen world, as falsehood is the currency in which our enemy, **Satan**, deals. **Yeshua** described **him** as **a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44)**. **The Great Deceiver (Revelation 12:9)** works to convince people of **his** lies, so it is vital that we set our **minds of the things** that are **true** instead;

Second, whatever is honorable (4:8c Greek): **Paul** and **the Philippians** lived in a culture where the pursuit of **honor** and the avoidance of shame were high values. However, **Paul** doesn't merely adopt a secular view; instead, **he** focuses on the Gospel. **Paul's** emphasis is on **the mindset** of a believer, thus the word **honorable** (Greek: *semnos*) is viewed from a godly perspective. Our thoughts, affections, and will are to be set on people or **things** that are **honorable** and worthy of respect. In this sense one could easily envision **Paul** directing **the Philippians'** attention to **those who walk as we do (3:17)**, such as **Paul (3:12-16)**, **Timothy (2:19-24)**, and **Epaphroditus (2:25-30)**. But **Paul's** language here seems to intentionally broaden the scope to anything that is **honorable** and worthy of respect. As such, it is appropriate for believers to affirm the actions of unbelievers as worthy of respect/honor without suggesting that they have any personal relationship with **God**.

Once again, the pursuit of that which is honorable requires turning away from the dishonorable. The world's cheap imitations of **joy** in constant partying, or the life wholly devoted to the pursuit of entertainment, would also be the opposite of devotion to the **things of honor**. The godly person is a **joyful** person, but not a silly person, and as such focuses on their relationship with **Yeshua**, which is the greatest **joy** of all;

Third, whatever is just (4:8d Greek): In this context, the word **just** (Greek: *dikaios*) refers to something of **justice**. But it is also the same word found in **1:7**, where **Paul** says that it is **"right"** for **him** to think the way **he** does about **the Philippians**. Several times in this letter (**1:11, 3:6-9**) **he** has already used the

related word **righteousness** (Greek: *dikaiosyne*). Again, the scope of this category of **just** or **right** is quite broad, allowing things that are not specifically spiritual to qualify under this category. Ultimately, **ADONAI Himself** is the standard of what is **just/right**, and by **His** common grace in this world unbelievers are also capable of doing likewise. So, anyone who obeys **God's Word** and will, even unwittingly, can be referred to as **just/right**.

However, dedication to **God's** standards of **justice** will set a believer apart from **the world**, whose fake “justice” often boils down to the rejection of **God's** Torah, and the embrace of a demonic **world** view. While believers' respects all duly constituted authorities (see the commentary on **Romans De – Respecting Civil Authority**), our concept of **justice** is defined by **God** and **His Word**, not by polls and elections. **ADONAI** dwells on eternal and unchanging values rooted in **His** own sovereign character;

Fourth, whatever is pure (4:8e Greek): Although originally a word exclusively linked to religious ritual, objects and people, over time, pure (Greek: *hagnos*) took on a more ethical and inward significance. Consequently, **pure** is applied to **the wisdom of ADONAI (James 3:17)**, a **wife's** conduct (**First Peter 3:2**), and to **Messiah Himself (First John 3:3)**. Here in **4:8e**, **Paul** calls us to set our **minds** on **things** that are **pure**; in other words, **things** that are not stained or polluted. Of course in one sense everything in **creation** is already stained by sin (see the commentary on **Romans Ck – The Creation and Redemption**), but that does not prevent **Paul** from encouraging **the Philippians** to focus on **their** thoughts, affections, and will on those **things** in this world that exhibit (albeit imperfectly) **purity**.

With this focus on **purity**, we turn from **the world's impurity (First John 2:15-16)**. **Paul's** day featured a linking of the “sacred” with sexual immorality. So in our day, the siren call to obsession with sexual immorality and sensuality – with no thought of **God** or spiritual realities – saturates our culture (see the commentary on **Deuteronomy Br – Do Not Commit Adultery**). When we **think about whatever is pure**, it will free us from whatever is polluted;

Fifth, whatever is lovely (4:8f Greek): When **Paul** uses the word **lovely** (Greek: *prosphile*), **he** is referring to anything that *pertains to causing pleasure or delight*. Although this word found nowhere else in the B'rit Chadashah, in Greco-Roman literature it was often used with the sense of someone or something that is *pleasing* or **dear**. A letter written in 121 AD, Plotina, the widow of Emperor Trajan, refers to

his successor Hadrian as “most pleasing in all things . . . to me. The Jewish historian Josephus (37-100 AD) uses this term several times to refer to people who are especially dear in contrast to others (*Antiquities* 1:258, 2:186, 4:203, 5:189, 17:149, 19:115 and 121). By challenging **the Philippians** to focus **their minds** on things that are **lovely**, **Paul** is not merely asking them to “think positively” and avoid “negative thoughts.” Rather, it is a call to have our **minds** set on those things which bring **delight** to our **hearts**. More specifically, in **the Philippian** context, this word may be particularly chosen to call that body of believers to focus on the grace of **God** at work in **their** fellow believers, rather than fixate on their obvious shortcomings. As such it is another way of **regarding others more important than yourselves (2:3b)**. Thinking of our own weaknesses, we shouldn’t allow a fellow believer’s weaknesses to define our opinion of him or her.

The embrace of **the lovely** means rejecting the base and the ugly. In **Paul’s** day, it would have worked out in rejection of the brutality and worship of force. In our day, much that passes for humor involves degradation and reversal of **whatever is pure**. Entire movies are devoted to a series of shameful acts in the pursuit of laughs at all costs; some comedians make their careers mocking whatever is **lovely**. But we are to cherish whatever **God** cherishes. **His** devotion reaches the highest peaks in seeing the beauty of **ADONAI Himself (Psalm 27:4)**, dwelling on **His** perfections and qualities – the very thing that **the world** scorns;

Sixth, whatever is admirable (4:8g Greek): Like the previous adjective, the word translated **admirable** (Greek: *euphemos*) occurs nowhere in the B’rit Chadashah. This word often referred to speech that was carefully chosen out of respect for someone. In contrasting thinking with speaking, Philo describes the man who “utters words which are not proper [Greek: *euphemon*]” (*On the Change of Names* 1:242). As it is used here in **4:8g**, it seems to emphasize not just speech, but anything that is worthy of commendation or praise. There may also be a sense of restraint involved, such that the emphasis falls on those **things** that are praiseworthy in light of their appropriateness.

Mention of the proper and commendable reminds us of the opposite: the improper and the unworthy. Our day has seen the spectacle of some even bringing lurid tell-alls sold as testimonies, crude jokes that have no place in the pulpit. **The apostle** alluded to private sins which **the ungodly do in secret (Ephesians 5:12b)**. These should not be our focal point; instead, we must **think about** these **eight virtues** that display the character of **God Himself**;

Seventh, if anything is excellent (4:8h NIV): The noun translated **excellent** (Greek: *arete*) was a term that referred to *excellence* or *merit* within a social context. Borrowing language from **Isaiah 43:21**, **Peter** states that believers are to **proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9)**. It is also one of the traits that should characterize mature believers (**2 Peter 1:3-5**). But this term was also used widely in Greco-Roman literature, especially in philosophical circles, where it referred to virtue. As such, it became a focal point in discussions of moral philosophy by famous thinkers such as Plato, Aristotle, and Socrates. Plato argued there were four classic virtues: wisdom, courage, prudence, and justice.

But in contrast to Greek philosophy, when the B'rit Chadashah speaks of various **virtues they** are always rooted in a covenant relationship with **ADONAI** through **Yeshua Messiah** and empowered by **the Ruach**. So while many of **the Philippians** would have been familiar with this term in a secular sense, **Paul's** use of it here in this context provides a clear redefinition of the Greek meaning. So, **Paul** invites us to **think about** whatever exhibits **excellence** and godly **virtue**, whether it is the actions of others or the character of **God Himself**.

Mental pursuit of what will strengthen a godly character means turning away from what weakens it. Love for **the world's** approval with its acceptance of **the world's** values, cowardice in the face of unbelieving criticism and opposition, neglecting that which is hard and necessary in favor of what is easy and weakening; these must be set aside in the pursuit of what **ADONAI** sees as **excellent** and **virtuous**;

Eighth, if anything is praiseworthy (4:8i NIV): When used in the B'rit Chadashah, the word translated **praiseworthy** (Greek: *epainos*) usually refers to *the act of expressing admiration or approval*, here it speaks of *a thing worthy of praise*. **Paul** used this same word in **1:11** for the ultimate result of believers being filled with the fruit of righteousness as the **praise of God**. Although the term is applied to **God (Ephesians 1:6, 12, and 14)**, more often it is applied to **people (Rom 2:29, 13:3; First Cor 4:5; Second Corinthians 8:18; First Peter 2:14)**. In Greco-Roman literature it had the sense of approval or praise, and as such, it was something sought after from both the gods and other people as well. In using it here in **4:8i**, **Paul** directs us to focus our attention on anything that is worthy of commendation, and as such, should not be limited explicitly to "spiritual" **things**.

But it is the pursuit of that **praise** and approval from **ADONAI** that frees us from the enslavement of seeking **it** from other people. Our **Lord** said that **what this**

world values is detestable in the sight of God (Luke 16:15b). We should concern ourselves less with the **God-hating** world adores, and more with the qualities of character and life that will receive **the Lord's well done** in the end (**Matthew 25:21 and 23**). An eye on the throne-room of **YHVH** is the cure to the fascination with the circus of this **world**.

These, then, are the **eight virtues** that, as believers, our **minds** should focus on. This is not to be confused with the modern-day emphasis on "being positive" or "thinking positive thoughts." Instead, **they** should help us to consider what should fill our **minds** and **hearts**. The Bible is clear about what we should **think about**. **With all diligence, watch over your heart, for everything you do flows from it** (see the commentary on **Proverbs Ba - Guard your Heart**). **Yeshua** teaches a similar truth when **He** says: **What comes out of a person is what defiles them. For it is from within, out of a person's heart, that evil thoughts come - sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and defile a person (Mark 7:20-23).** Furthermore, consider what **Messiah** teaches in **Matthew 12:34b-35: For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of. A good person produces good things from the treasury of a good heart, and an evil person produces evil things from the treasury of an evil heart.** So, the issue here is not a simplistic "think positively;" but rather, a recognition that what we **think about** inevitably shapes the way we speak and act. Thus, **we** must **take every thought captive and make it obey the Messiah** (see the commentary on **Second Corinthians Bt - Winning the Spiritual War**).

And while we do not in any way want to diminish the broad scope of anything that falls under these **eight virtues**, it should be noted that **Messiah** is the perfect embodiment of each one. **He** is the one who called **Himself: The way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6)**. As the risen **Lamb of God**, **He** is worthy of our praise today even as all of heaven praises **Him** as **the One** who has purchased **a people for Himself from every tribe and language and people and nation**, and who has made **them a kingdom of priests to our God** so that **they** will **reign on the earth (Revelation 5:9-10)**. If what we **think** remains fixed on **the Master** as the very embodiment of these **eight virtues**, we will **walk worthy** of our **Lord** (see **At - Walking Worthy**).¹⁷⁸

(7) Whatever you have learned, or received, or heard from me, or seen in me - put it into practice. Then the God of peace will be with you (4:9 NIV). This verse introduces the final element that is essential for spiritual stability.

People in whom **the Word of God richly dwells (Colossians 3:16)**, and who therefore live obediently, **stand firm** when the winds of difficulty, temptation, and compromise blow around **them**. Holy living can only take place when right attitudes and right thoughts police the flesh (**Acts 2:42**).

The apostles were more than the source of biblical knowledge: **they** also modeled the standards of godly behavior. For that reason **Paul** encouraged **the Philippians** to **pattern your lives after mine, and keep your eyes on those who walk as we do (3:17; cf. 1 Cor 4:16 and 11:1; 1 Thessalonians 1:6)**. Paul repeats that thought here, urging **the Philippians** to **put it into practice whatever they had learned, or received, or heard from him**. His life exemplified the **eight virtues** to which **he** called **them**. By reminding **the Philippians** of what **they** had **seen** in **him**, **Paul** appealed to **their** firsthand experience with **him**. **They** had observed his character during **the apostle's** stay in **Philippi**, and **they** knew there was no credibility gap between the message **he** preached and the life **he** lived. So, **he** could encourage **the Philippians** to pattern **their** lives after **his**.

The promise attached to such obedience is that **the God of peace will be with you (4:9)**. **The God** whose character is **peace** is the giver of **peace**. The title **God of peace** is one of **Paul's** favorites (cf. **Romans 15:33** and **16:20; Second Corinthians 13:11; First Thessalonians 5:23**). It is a reminder that those who have godly attitudes, thoughts, and deeds will be **guarded** both by **the peace of God** and by **the God of peace**. **His Presence** is essential for the strength, tranquility, and contentment necessary for spiritual stability.¹⁷⁹

*Dear heavenly **Father**, praise **You** for giving me a heart full of **Your peace** when I set my **mind** on **You**. There will be many problems in this life; but I can still be full of **Your peace** when I fill my **mind** with **whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, (Philippians 4:8b)**. To reduce temptation, help me to keep my mind occupied with **God's Word**. The wisest man who ever lived warned: **Be careful how you think; your life is shaped by your thoughts (Proverbs 4:23)**. Help me not to allow trash into my mind indiscriminately. Help me to be selective, to choose carefully what I think about. Help me to **take every thought captive and make it obey the Messiah (Second Corinthians 10:5)**. Thank **You** that as I meditate on **You** and **Your** awesome character, I am filled with **the shalom of God (Philippians 4:6-7)**. In **Messiah Yeshua's** holy **Name** and power of **His** resurrection. Amen*