

Whatever is True and Beautiful

Thomas Robinson, *Lives Shaped by Jesus 11*, February 24, 2013

Philippians 4:4-9

⁴ Celebrate with joy in the LORD always; again I will say, rejoice!

⁵ Let your reasonableness/gentleness be known to all people.

The Lord is nearby: ⁶ do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding (every mind), will guard your hearts and your thoughts in Messiah Jesus.

⁸ And then, brothers and sisters,
whatever is true,
whatever is honorable,
whatever is just,
whatever is pure,
whatever is lovely,
whatever is commendable,
if there is any excellence/virtue,
if there is anything worthy of praise,
reflect on these things.

⁹ What you have learned and received
and heard and seen in me –
practice these things,
and the God of peace will be with you.

Philippians 2:1-2, 5-8

¹ So if there is any encouragement in the Messiah, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any deep feeling and compassion, ² **fill up my joy** that you **think the same thing**, having **the same love, together in soul** and **thinking the one thing**. ...

⁵ **Think this** among yourselves, which also means in Messiah Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not consider that equality with God a thing to be exploited, ⁷ rather he emptied himself, by taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. ⁸ And being found in human shape, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ...

Philippians 1:9-11

⁹ And **it is my prayer** that **your love may abound** more and more, with **knowledge** and all **discernment**, ¹⁰ so that you may **approve** what is **excellent**, and so be **without pretense** and **blameless** for Messiah's day, ¹¹ filled with the **fruit of righteousness** that comes through **Jesus Messiah**, to the **glory** and **praise** of God.

2 Corinthians 4:2

² But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but **by the open statement of the truth** we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience **in the sight of God**.

Getting the Focus Right

Throughout this letter Paul has been concerned about focus. His readers were mostly Gentiles, Romans, Greeks in the midst of a powerful culture/empire (structure of power, allegiance, history, art, literature, philosophy, music, myth, religion, etc.) – complex, exciting, troubling – like NYC today with many voices claiming to define reality.

The Gospel is re-newing / re-making their minds. Not as a new wisdom but an astonishing event at the heart of reality. It has already happened and puts everything in new light. It is the event of Jesus Messiah. Think it. Sing it. It's God's heart. It changes everything.

So much flows from it: Joy (together, individually). Gentleness toward everyone. Realization of Jesus' nearness that overcomes anxiety. A dialogue of gratitude, request, and trust with God. An experience of God's peace, beyond our reach, safety to explore and grow.

Getting the Breadth Right

Paul's emphasis on this focus ('think the one thing!') makes v. 8 surprising, startling. We might well have thought that Paul wanted religious thought to monopolize their minds.

But Paul knows that Jesus/God is not the center of a religion but Creator of the Universe. Everything that exists comes from him. Nothing is outside his authority, love, rule.

Paul doesn't have to say this. It's easier to stay limited, separate. But to seek God's kingdom is to lay claim to everything – art, science, culture, music, history, politics.

'Thinking the one thing' is a lens through which everything comes into distinct focus.

Whatever is True

Just notice that first phrase: "*Whatever is true.*" If God is true, then everything that is true is in some way related to God. If anything is true, it reveals something of reality.

Every fact about the world is open for exploration. Everything that is learned in the great enterprise that we call science is something learned about God's creation – about God. People often have ideologies that reject God, but no truth of nature undermines God. New discoveries continually challenge our old understandings, but God was already there. Science works beautifully within distinct limits (repeatable falsifiability) that don't allow God as an object of science. But that doesn't mean that God doesn't include science. The creator is a physicist, mathematician, chemist, biologist, evolutionist, lover, savior.

What is true is by no means always good – especially about humans. Literature, art, psychology, history, etc. seek to understand the potent mix of good and bad in humans. Paul calls us toward the true. So much distorts, glorifies, demonizes, dehumanizes.

Whatever is Beautiful

So we can reflect on each of these adjectives. All of justice, ethics, power, rights comes into play. All forms of beauty, excellence. All that is worthy of respect. All that is innocent, pure. What people praise, what is worthy of praise. All forms of virtue.

All these things, Paul says, are to find their place/consideration in Christian life and thought. They are to be evaluated, engaged, seen in the light of core reality – God.

We are called to an expansive, generous, engaged mind, open to all of God's creation.

Learning, Growing in the God of Peace

Paul ends by bringing us readers back to a very practical level of learning, incorporating new traditions and examples from Paul as they seek God's kingdom.

The Peace of God guards us; the God of Peace is with us on that Quest – his upward call.