

The “mind” was considered the source of one’s physical life, and thus to “guard the mind” would have meant in the Semitic world to guard one’s whole being, that is, the final outcome of one’s life.

And all of this, ultimately, is summed up by Paul’s words, “in Messiah Yeshua.” It is our union with Him that not only secures our eternal life with Him but also enables us in our lives here to be His witnesses and those who give Him the honor He deserves, shining as lights in this darkened world.

8 – Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.

Paul used the same term, “Finally” (Τὸ λοιπόν, *to loipon*), in 3:1, where it clearly denotes “as for the rest” or “furthermore,” and does not indicate the coming to a close of his epistle. He may likewise be using this opening “finally” in our text to indicate the summing up of his immediate exhortations rather than signaling that he has finished his epistle. For in the immediate context we see Paul’s clear exhortations for believers in a given community to foster true friendship and unity.

In the previous context, he begins with “rejoice in the Lord always, again I will say, rejoice.” Here the very foundation for establishing a strong and vibrant community of faith is for each member to grow in affirming the goodness of God and that true rejoicing in all aspects of life flows from a growing dependence upon Him and rejoicing in all of His goodness.

Next he writes: “Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near.” Such a “gentle spirit” is that which desires unity and harmony, and is therefore careful and on guard against fostering a spirit of self centeredness and rather practicing what he admonishes us:

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; (Phil 2:3)

Next, in the previous context, Paul reminds us:

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. (Phil 4:6)

So by opening v. 8 with “Finally,” it seems most likely that Paul is encouraging his readers to make a “memory-list” of these earlier exhortations, and to put them into practice: “Rejoice in the Lord!,” “Have a gentle spirit toward others,” and “Live a life of faith in the goodness of God.”

Then, having the solid foundation of faith as the basis for serving the Lord, Paul goes on to give a wonderful list of adjectives which define the very meditation of the heart of faith, followed by a command: “think on these things.” Further, it is clear by the way the list is arranged that Paul is not teaching us to have one or two of the list that follows, but we are to strive to incorporate all of them as a complete and essential character of the believer’s life.

... *whatever is true* – Unfortunately many people accept as “true” to be that which their present culture affirms to be true. But this is not a valid definition, for in order for “truth” to be discernible, there must be an unchanging standard by which it is measured. And since cultures change through the years and ages, what one’s own culture accepts as “true” may, in fact, not be true at all. There is obviously only one unchangeable standard of truth, and that standard is God Himself and the revelation He has given.

God is the norm of truth. That is true in thought, word, or deed, which answers to the nature of God as revealed in the moral ideals of the gospel of his Son, who manifests him, and who can therefore say, ‘I am the truth’ (John 14:6).¹

Here is a very important “beginning point” which Paul states for all who desire to enhance and strengthen the community of faith in which they are members: truth must be the foundation upon which the believing community thrives and matures. And this means that the Scriptures and the Scriptures alone must stand as the final voice by which truth is ultimately discerned.

... *whatever is honorable* – The Greek word translated “honorable” by the NASB is the Greek *σεμνός* (*semmos*), found only three other times in the Apostolic Scriptures:

Deacons likewise must be men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain, (1Tim 3:8)

Women must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things. (1Tim 3:11)

1 Vincent, Martin. *Philippians* in ICC (T & T Clark, 1897), p. 138.

Older men are to be temperate, dignified, sensible, sound in faith, in love, in perseverance. (Tit 2:2)

The Greek Lexicon *BDAG* offers these possible definitions:

“worthy of respect/honor, noble, dignified, serious, honorable, venerable, holy, above reproach”¹

Interestingly, these same personal characteristics are required of those who hold a leadership role in the assembly, such as Deacons. Thus, Paul clearly teaches us here that all who name the Name of Yeshua as “honorable” ought to be living a life of honor to Him and thus to one another. “Honorable” includes “trustworthy,” able to be counted upon, and striving to love others even as Yeshua loves us.

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. (Jn 13:34)

And what is the characteristic of this love as demonstrated to us in the very person and work of Yeshua? It is a love which considers the needs of others more important than my own desires and wishes. Granted, this has to be expressed in the realm of wisdom, but the love which is exemplified by Yeshua Himself is a “self-giving love,” a giving that has the goal of bettering the one loved.

... *whatever is right* – Here, the Greek word translated “right” by the NASB is *δίκαιος* (*dikaïos*), the word that is often translated as “righteous,” and envisions a person whose whole life is patterned by obedience to God and to living in accordance with His standards.

How does this word pair with the previous “whatever is true?” It is this: to be a righteous person means far more than simply “knowing the truth.” It means having a life as lived out before others that is in harmony with the truth. It is taking what one knows to be true and then living out the truth in one’s everyday activities and relationships.

... *whatever is pure* – “Pure” translates the Greek word *ἅγιος* (*hagnos*) which is found only seven other times in the Apostolic Scriptures,² and carries the sense of “pure” and “holy,” generally in the sense of living in accordance with the righteous standards as set forth by God

1 *BDAG*, “σεμνός,” p. 919.

2 2 Cor 7:11; 11:2; 1Tim 5:22; Titus 2:5; James 3:17; 1Pet 3:2; 1Jn 3:3

Himself. Thus the characteristic of a person who is known to be “pure” is that he or she can be trusted to tell the truth, to live the truth, and to help others walk in the ways of truth.

In the Lxx, this Greek word is used to denote real integrity, the very integrity of God Himself. Note, for instance, Ps 11:7 [12:7 in the Hebrew].

The oracles of the Lord are pure oracles (λόγια ἀγνά); as silver tried in the fire, proved in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. (Ps 11:7)

... *whatever is lovely* – The Greek word translated as “lovely” is προσφιλῆς (*prospihilēs*), and is found only here in the Apostolic Scriptures. As a result, we must depend upon its use in extra-biblical literature to get a sense of how it is used in our text. When we do, we discover that it portrays a close relationship with another person. It can carry the sense of “having a special interest in someone, beloved, dear, loving, kindly disposed, devoted, etc.”¹ In our text it denotes a person who maintains their promises to others, who is easily approached, and who has demonstrated a genuine desire and ability to foster and maintain working relationships with others. Once again, this admirable attribute must be exercised within the context of wisdom. No one is “lovely” to everyone, so surely Paul is not suggesting that this attribute is someone who seeks to “be all things to all people.” Surely the standards of righteousness set forth by our Lord and made clear throughout the Scriptures are to be the very warp and woof of one who seeks to be “lovely” as God intends.

... *whatever is of good repute* – The Greek word translated here as “good repute” is εὐφημος (*euphēmos*), which carries the sense of “to give a good report, to affirm something, to provide a fuller explanation.”² Once again, this is the only time in the Apostolic Scriptures that the word is found, though its use in the time of Paul seems to be well founded. It carried the sense of that which others praise and which is generally received as honorable and praiseworthy. The disciple of Yeshua ought to live in such a way that others recognize the blessing that comes upon a life that is lived in accordance with God’s righteous standards. The success of living out such patterns of righteousness will be seen in one’s relationships, as well as one’s ability to care for others.

1 BDAG, “προσφιλῆς,” p. 1058.

2 BDAG, “εὐφημος,” p. 1053.

... if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. – Paul now changes the flow by introducing an “if – then” clause. He uses the terms *excellence* (ἀρετή, *aretē*) and *praise worthy* (ἔπαινος, *epainos*) to describe the measure by which the whole life of the believer is to be essayed. To be considered as “excellent” and “worthy of praise” does not mean to somehow be thought of highly by those who have no moral standards. Surely Paul is talking about being held as excellent and praise worthy among those who know the Lord and are likewise seeking to live in accordance with His righteous standards. But it is true that very often, a life of righteousness lived out in obedience to the Lord and His leading, will also be recognized by unbelievers as well. As Calvin notes:

Paul, therefore, does not bid them try to gain applause or commendation by virtuous actions, nor even to regulate their life according to the judgments of the people, but simply means, that they should devote themselves to the performance of good works, which merit commendation, that the wicked, and those who are enemies of the gospel, while they deride Christians and cast reproach upon them, may, nevertheless, be constrained to commend their deportment.¹

The Greek word ἀρετή (*aretē*), translated as “excellence” by the NASB, could also carry the sense of “uncommon character worthy of praise,” or “exceptional civic virtue.”² Peter uses this same word, applying it to the divine “excellence” which is to be the pattern followed by all who are the people of God through faith in Yeshua.

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; (1Pet 2:9)

seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. (2Pet 1:3)

Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, (2Pet 1:5)

1 Calvin, *Philippians*, p. 121.

2 BDAG, “ἀρετή,” p. 130.

It is clear, then, that to strive for “excellence” as a believer in Yeshua, is to emulate the very “excellencies” that characterize Him, even as He walked and lived upon this earth. It is, in short, to “have the mind of Messiah,” and this is only possible as the believer constantly seeks to know the Lord and His desires in a personal way, that is, to emulate His way of thinking in all of life’s actions and decisions.

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

Paul now puts forth his own life as the “mentor” of the Philippian community, to be an example from which they could learn how to “walk” in their world as true followers and disciples of Yeshua. For the early communities of “the way” surely saw themselves as aligned with the historic Jewish faith, based as it was upon the Tanach. As such, the idea of emulating one’s teacher was very much in place in the time of Paul and he therefore calls upon those believers in the Philippian community to “follow in His footsteps” as they had come to know him as a true apostle of Yeshua, endowed with instructions from Yeshua and committed to teaching these principles and life-actions to those he disciplined. Indeed, in a world where the written text of the Tanach was not readily available in written form to everyone, it was of vital importance that the “teacher” not only teach the truth of the Scriptures but should also model these truths in his own life and teaching.

This emphasizes an obvious and very important reality for those who seek to become teachers within the body of Messiah, namely, that their lives must be a living testimony of their words, otherwise their teaching will inevitably bear little fruit. As Calvin notes:

Now, the main thing in a public speaker should be, that he may speak, not with his mouth merely, but by his life, and procure authority for his doctrine by rectitude of life. Paul, accordingly, procures authority for his exhortation on this ground, that he had, by his life no less than by his mouth, been a leader and master of virtues.¹

Note that the example of Paul’s life was not only transmitted when the Philippian community was actually being taught by him, but also by means of his reputation and life of holiness which they had “heard” from others. They had both first-hand awareness of Paul’s sanctified

¹ Calvin, *Philippians*, p. 122.

life, which was then supported and even enhanced by the reputation he had among other believing communities.

...and the God of peace will be with you. – Paul had previously mentioned the fact that two ladies, Euodia and Syntyche, were at odds with each other. As a result, there were, no doubt, others who were taking sides in the whole issue. Thus Paul once again emphasizes that God is the One Who brings peace, and that only through submission to His will, confessing where wrong has been done, and seeking forgiveness and reconciliation with each other, could the swelling division be overcome and peace be restored within the Philippian community of believers.

While such peace and reconciliation would be so important for the Philippian community itself, it was, from Paul's perspective, even more important for the testimony of Yeshua as Lord and Head of the ekklesia. For surely if God is the God of peace, then His people ought to model this peace by their ability to love one another, forgive each other for wrongs done, and thus to seek the good of each other for the glory of God.

Indeed, the phrase "the God of peace" is one of Paul's favorites, used four other times in his epistles:

Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen. (Rom 15:33)

The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Yeshua be with you. (Rom 16:20)

Finally, brethren, rejoice, be made complete, be comforted, be like-minded, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. (2Cor 13:11)

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Yeshua Messiah. (1Thess 5:23)

This final phrase, "the God of peace will be with you," is not one of conditionality, as though somehow overlooking God's omnipresence. That Paul writes "the God of peace will be with you" is a promise of God's ever blessed presence with those who are truly His. "I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matt 28:20). Indeed, it is the very promise of God's presence with all who are His, that secures the sanctification of His people. It is the very presence of God with us that convicts, strengthens, and enables the believer to grow in becoming more and more conformed to His likeness.