

## SERMON PHILIPPIANS 4 DO YOU SUFFER FROM DTP?

July 14, 2019

As we discussed last Sunday, the Book of Acts is the history of the Early Church. One of the main characters in Acts is the Apostle Paul. Acts describes his conversion from persecuting the Christian Church to becoming its main missionary. Paul was responsible for establishing many new churches during his missionary trips throughout Asia Minor. These new churches experienced growing pains as they dealt with new believers coming from many different religious backgrounds and traditions. We are blessed to have in the New Testament many of Paul's letters that address the problems that these early churches experienced and are a valuable resource for us today.

The advice that Paul gave these early churches is timeless and still applies to us today. This morning let's look at some of the guidance that he gave the church at Philippi. I will be reading from the fourth chapter of Philippians, verses 4 through 9.

Read Philippians 4:4-9

Now today most of us have a computer in our home. I think that we would all agree that the computer is one of the great inventions of our lifetime. Now I am old enough to admit that when I was at Clemson University, there was no such thing as a personal computer. We had a big mainframe and your program was punched out on individual cards. One program would require a large box of punch cards and heaven help you if you dropped the box. Anybody remember that?

We were also still using slide-rules back then. Back in 2002, when we were reconstructing the Big I in downtown Albuquerque, one day my young bridge engineer was in my office discussing some design issues, and I pulled out my trusty K&E slide-rule and asked him if he knew what it was. He replied that he had seen one once in a museum. Boy, did that make me feel old!

Unfortunately, the slide-rule is now a museum piece and computers are a part of our everyday life. In a way we can't live without them. However, they can be a pain in the neck at times, especially when you get one of those viruses. Remember when only people contracted viruses? Remember when terms like parasite and worm were applied only to living organism and little brothers? Remember when viral infections were treated by doctors and quarantine meant isolation of diseased people and pets? No longer, nowadays our computers get just as sick as we do.

There are thousands of computer viruses out there. Most likely created by the same people who like to spray graffiti on our buildings or loosen the cap on the salt shaker at restaurants. These Trojan Horses sneak their way into our computers and gobble up our data like the old Pac-Man game.

Our personal computer occasionally gets infested with a virus that comes through email, disrupting its operation. Judy does not like my approach to solving computer problems; yelling at it and telling it that I'll show it who is the boss and then unplugging it. Now I have been driving Fords for so long that I am just used to kicking or hitting things with a hammer to get them going again. Despite what Judy says, when I reboot it, it works. Judy likes to use one of those anti-virus computer programs. Well, I guess it's like the old saying: different strokes for different folks.

Now despite all the claims from the computer companies, God created the greatest computer in the world – the human mind. Here we can store and process massive amounts of data. And like the computer on your desk at home or in the office, our minds can be infested by viruses, by destructive thoughts. Computer viruses have names like Cookie Monster, etc. Mental viruses are known as anxiety, bitterness, anger, guilt, shame, greed, and insecurity. They worm their way into your system and diminish, even disable your mind. Max Lucado in his book *Next Door Savior* has labeled them DTPs – destructive thought patterns.

Do you suffer from DTPs? When you see somebody who is successful, are you jealous? Do you like to gossip or talk about other people? Do you ever feel superior to those around you? Ever argue with someone in your mind? Do obsessions control your life? Do you rehash the times when you have been hurt by someone's words or actions? Do you worry about things you have no control over? Do you assume the worst about someone or the future? If so, you might suffer from DTPs?

What would our lives be like without DTPs? Would you be different if no dark or destructive thought ever entered your mind? Suppose you could relive your life without any guilt, lust, revenge, insecurity, worry or fear; never wasting mental energy on gossip or scheming. Would you be different? Wouldn't it be great to be free of destructive thoughts; to have more energy and peace of mind? A lifetime of healthy and holy thoughts could render anyone a joyful genius.

But where would you find such a person? You can buy an uninfected computer, but an uninfected person seems impossible. You can trace a computer virus back to its hacker, and you can trace our mental viruses back to fall of the first man Adam. Because of sin, our minds are full of destructive thoughts. In the text that Glenda/Bonnie read earlier, Paul notes that the mind of a sinful person is dead, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is alive and at peace. Thus, we can blame DTPs on sin. Sin messes with our mind. But what if the virus never enters? Suppose a person never opened the devil's emails? What would that person be like?

In the second chapter of his gospel, the Apostle Luke describes such a person as a twelve year old boy sitting in the temple: "His parents found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the

teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers.” Throughout His life here on earth, Jesus Christ was followed by disciples, analyzed by crowds, criticized by others, and scrutinized by the religious leaders; yet no one could remember Him committing a sin. Not that He wasn’t tempted; Hebrews 4:15 tells us that He was “tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.” Jesus had all the normal human emotions, desires and temptations, but He resisted the urge to open all the contaminated emails that came His way.

And that is God’s wish for each one of us here this morning, to resist opening the contaminated emails of this world, to rid ourselves of destructive thoughts; thoughts that ruin our lives and steal our happiness and peace of mind. The Apostle Paul understood God’s desire for us when he wrote in Romans 12:2 – “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by renewing your mind.” You may have been born prone to viruses, but you don’t have to live that way. In other words, focus on God and you will be changed from the inside out. Remember whatever a person allows to occupy their mind will sooner or later determine their speech and actions. If a person thinks about something long enough, he will eventually come to the point where he cannot stop thinking about it. Those little, naughty thoughts can someday result in serious harmful sins. Our outward appearance and actions are directly related to our thoughts.

Paul expanded on this in verse 7: “And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.” Here is the ultimate, the divine anti-virus program for your thoughts. The peace of God will guard your mind like a military sentry; put up a firewall that nothing including the devil can penetrate. Such a relief is desperately needed in this time of nervous breakdowns, tranquilizers, and mental distress.

So how do you install this anti-virus program and construct this wonderful firewall - by developing a good thought pattern. Paul’s instructions for installing this program are outlined in verse 8: “Finally, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is noble, whatever is lovely, whatever is excellent or praiseworthy, think about such things.” We need to fill our minds with things that are noble and pleasing: the best, not the worst; the beautiful, not the ugly; things to praise, not things to criticize.

It is common sense; if your mind is in the gutter, you will be there also. In describing a movie, a critic once wrote: “The plot moves rapidly down the sewer.” You may have seen that movie! Now this trash would not be so damaging if the mind could be equipped like your kitchen sink with a garbage disposal. Then you could flush away all the filth and be done with it, but the mind does not work that way. It stores up impressions for a lifetime. The only way to protect the mind is to expose it to the best.

Paul encourages us to develop a positive thought pattern in our daily life. Jesus has called us to be the light and salt of the world. Good thoughts that lead to good actions will definitely impact the world and those around us. There's the story of a school teacher who visited the home of one of her troublesome students. She noticed that the house was dirty and messy. The next time she visited, she brought the most beautiful plant she could find and placed it in the center of the dining room table. At first the people in the house did not realize the beauty of the plant. However, as time passed, the people began to see the beauty radiated by the plant and felt a deep sense of shame about the way they kept the house. So they began to clean up and made the house fit for the beauty of the plant. Good thoughts always lead to good actions.

You know what I am talking about. If you let negative thoughts take over your mind, the next thing you know you are depressed. Someone says something to hurt your feelings and you dwell on it for hours and even days, and the next time you see that person you unload on them like a pit-bull. We needlessly worry over things that we don't have any control over. These anxious thoughts crowd our mind causing loss of sleep, fatigue, and other illnesses. At other times, thoughts of suspicion lead us to actions that are out of character for us. Unwholesome thoughts, bad attitudes, and painful memories can lodge in our minds and can even cause chronic health problems. The devil loves to mess with our minds if we let him. But God tells us to renew our minds.

The Bible teaches that we can control our thoughts. Thus, we must not adopt a defeatist attitude saying that we simply cannot help it when our minds are filled with unwelcome thoughts. The secret lies in positive thinking. A person cannot entertain evil thoughts and thoughts about the Lord Jesus at the same time. So the next time you have a bad thought, think about Jesus.

In our world today, we are bombarded with constant information from TV, newspaper, and the internet. In this postmodern world when we get information in every imaginable way, our hunger isn't for knowledge but for wisdom. In our text, Paul offers the key to wisdom by instructing us to ponder only certain things: honor and justice, purity and beauty, value and virtue, and praise of Jesus Christ. Once we set our mind on these things, then we will receive God's peace, the peace that passes all understanding. Our thoughts should be so pure that they can stand the scrutiny of God. May we all be bold enough to declare with the psalmist in the 26<sup>th</sup> Psalm: "Test me, O Lord, and try me, examine my heart and my mind." Remember when asked, Jesus stated that the first and greatest commandment is to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your **mind**.

Americans spend hours and hours on the internet, playing video games and watching TV. How many of these images and thoughts do you think meet Paul's criteria in verse 8: "whatever is

true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is worthy of praise?" May we each apply God's anti-virus program and have pure thoughts. As Paul wrote in the third chapter of Colossians: "Set your mind on the things above, not on things that are on the earth." Give God your best thoughts and see if He will not change your mind and life for the best. Don't suffer from DTPs any longer; let the peace of God rule your heart and mind instead. Remember you are what you think! Amen.