

Sermon & Bible Study Helps

WHATEVER IS NOBLE . . . THINK ABOUT SUCH THINGS

Emphasis Passage: Philippians 4:8

Parallel Translations

King James: Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.

New King James Version: Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy — meditate on these things.

New International Version: Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable— if anything is excellent or praiseworthy— think about such things.

New American Standard Bible: 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.

Revised Standard Version: Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

Holman Christian Standard Bible: Finally brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable—if there is any moral excellence and if there is any praise—dwell on these things.

New Living Translation: And now, dear brothers and sisters, let me say one more thing as I close this letter. Fix your thoughts on what is true and honorable and right. Think about things that are pure and lovely and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise.

New Jerusalem Bible: Finally, brothers, let your minds be filled with everything that is true, everything that is honourable, everything that is upright and pure, everything that we love and admire — with whatever is good and praiseworthy.

Greek Text

Τὸ λοιπόν, ἀδελφοί, ὅσα ἐστὶν ἀληθῆ, ὅσα σεμνά, ὅσα δίκαια,
Finally, brothers whatever is true, whatever (is) honorable, whatever (is) just,

ὅσα ἀγνά, ὅσα προσφιλή, ὅσα εὐφήμα,
whatever (is) pure, whatever (is) lovely, whatever (is) commendable—

εἴ τις ἀρετὴ καὶ εἴ τις ἔπαινος, ταῦτα λογίζεσθε.
if anything (is) excellent, and if anything (is) praiseworthy—these things think about.

KEY WORDS (WITH STRONG'S REFERENCE NUMBERS)

λογίζεσθε (logizesthe) – Verb, present, middle, imperative, 2nd person, plural

(3049) λογίζομαι (logizomai) – count, reckon, think, evaluate, claim, reflect on

CONTEXT

As the apostle Paul brought his letter to the Christians in Philippi to a close, he urged on them certain attitudes that would help them as they were dealing with various internal and external problems. He called on them to rejoice in the Lord (4:4), to be gentle (4:5), not to be anxious (4:6), and to focus their minds on things that edify (4:8). He also called them to follow his own example of holy living (4:9). As they became such Christians, Paul assured them that the peace of God would be their great benefit. This peace would be personal and corporate in nature. They would experience personal peace as they focused on God rather than their problems (4:7), and they would experience peace in their fellowship as the God of peace dwelt among them (4:9).

SERMON AND BIBLE STUDY NOTES

Introduction

It has become nearly impossible to avoid seeing pornographic images. Anyone who channel surfs on television is certain to see some kind of lewd sexual imagery. Certain magazines continue to push the boundaries of sexual mores in word and image. And of course, practically anyone who has spent any time on the Internet has had that embarrassing and angering moment when he clicked on something thinking it was one thing and discovered it was something entirely different and very offensive.

Pornographers know that if they can get their images seen, a certain percentage of those exposed to them will not turn their eyes away, but will instead be enticed to want to see more. Once this decision is made, some of these men and women will begin the devastating descent into pornography addiction. And even those not addicted will be affected in ways that they never would have imagined.

When one considers the devastating effects of pornography on those engaged in its production, those who view it, and those affected by someone's pornography addiction, it is clear that there should be no room in a person's life for pornography. In his letter to the Philippians, the apostle Paul offers guidance that can help Christians build into themselves the tools they need to resist the enticing lure of pornography.

I. We Must Guard Our Minds.

The mind is the beginning point for all actions and attitudes. Paul was aware of this. He spoke often to his readers about the importance of their minds (e.g., Rom. 12:1-2; Eph. 4:23). Rick Warren, in

The Purpose Drive Life, p. 182, emphasizes the importance of the mind for Christian growth and maturity. He says that, "Change always starts first in your mind. The way you *think* determines the way you *feel*, and the way you feel influences the way you *act*." The role of the mind in relation to pornography is certainly significant. After all, pornography is a visual object. It influences the mind and the imagination in order to achieve its effect. A person may act out that effect in physical ways, but in reality those actions are the result of something that has happened in the person's mind.

What Paul had in mind was much more than some casual acquaintance with the things he mentioned. He told his readers that they should "think" about these things. The word translated "think" means more than to simply ponder something. R. Lenski, in *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Galatians, Ephesians, and Philippians*, p. 884, observes that what Paul wanted his readers to do was "ever take account of them as what they are and never appropriate any but these."

II. We Must Be Guided by Godly Morality.

Paul called his readers to make value judgments about things. There is such a thing as godly morality. Godly morality evaluates the appropriateness of all things according to the standards of right and wrong and good and bad communicated by God. This morality is informed by Scripture first, above personal opinion, public opinion, experience, or any other possible guide. Paul understood that all things are not appropriate for the Christian, or for anyone else for that matter, because there is a God and He has certain expectations for the way people think and behave.

The characteristics of the things Paul wanted his readers to think about were not superficial. Paul did not tell his readers to base their evaluation of the things they should appropriate on externals, like color or appeal. He told them to consider the essential qualities of these things. H. Kent, in *Ephesians, EBC*, p. 152, defines the qualities Paul urges on his readers: true, "valid, reliable, honest, the opposite of false"; noble, "a quality that makes them worthy of respect"; right, "what is upright or just, conformable to God's standards and thus worthy of his approval"; pure, "emphasizes moral purity and includes in some contexts the more restricted sense of 'chaste'"; lovely, "relates to what is pleasing, agreeing, or amiable"; admirable, "denotes what is praiseworthy, attractive, and what rings true to the highest standards."

III. We Must Give Our Attention to What Is Moral.

In summary, Paul described these things as "excellent" or "praiseworthy." Paul changed the sentence structure to conditional clauses here. Kent points out that this is a "rhetorical device that forces the reader to exercise his own discernment" in choosing the proper things to think about. This summary allows for considerable latitude—anything that possesses these qualities can be the object of Christian interest. On the other hand, the summary is very restrictive—nothing that does not meet these tests is acceptable.

Eventually, the Christian must make a conscious choice about what to give his attention to. There are such things as moral absolutes. Some things are just moral, and some are immoral. These are intrinsic characteristics, not determined by the beholder. In other words, beauty is not always in the eye of the beholder when it comes to morality. God decides what is moral and immoral; and if a person desires to please God, he will assess the morality of an object based on God's standards, not his own. Then, having made this spiritual assessment, the Christian must make the conscious decision to pay attention only to that which is moral in God's eyes.

Conclusion

While some people promote pornography as an art form or as a free speech issue, it is neither of these things. Pornography does not qualify as art because it does not represent that which is honorable. Pornography is not presented to emphasize the beauty of the human body. It is presented to stimulate sexual desire. Rather than lifting the observer to greater heights of appreciation for God's creation, it cheapens and degrades God's creation. Pornography does not qualify as a free speech issue because of its inherently destructive nature. Pornography is destructive to those who provide its images. The women exploited by pornography are used, abused, and then swept aside in a few short years in preference for other younger women. Too many of those who view pornography are incited to violent, sexual behavior, at times committed against children. For the same reason it is illegal to yell "fire" in a crowded auditorium, pornography should not be protected as free speech.

WHAT CAN ONE PERSON DO?

- Teach a Sunday School class for teenagers about sexual purity.
- Ask your pastor to preach a message about sexual purity.
- Ask your public library what its standards are about the availability of pornography on library computers. Work to change them if necessary.
- Check local stores and video stores to see if they are selling or renting pornographic materials. Ask the owners to remove those materials. If necessary, stop doing business with them and encourage others not to do business with them either.
- Talk with your children about God's gift of sexuality and its deeper meaning.
- Ask God to protect the minds of your children from the influences of pornographic images they may see.

HELPFUL SCRIPTURE

Bible Passages That Give Guidance about Pornography

Genesis 1:27-28; 2:18-25; Proverbs 31:10-31; The Song of Songs; John 8:1-11;
1 Corinthians 6:9-20; 7:1-9; Galatians 5:19-21; Ephesians 5:1-5, 22-33; Colossians 3:18-19;
1 Thessalonians 4:3-8; Titus 2:3-8; Hebrews 13:4; 1 Peter 3:1-7; 2 Peter 1:5-9

SUGGESTED BIBLE STUDY QUESTIONS

This is a suggested Bible study for any size group. The sermon notes on this sheet, the accompanying fact sheet, and the enclosed materials serve as resources as you prepare to teach and then lead this Bible study. Answers are provided with the questions when appropriate, but do not be too quick to give the answers. Allow the participants time to talk about the questions among themselves and offer their own answers.

Create Learning Readiness: Share some statistics about pornography from the accompanying Fact Sheet.

Ask: How pervasive do you think pornography is today?

Let members talk about their own experiences, but help the conversation stay healthy.

Say: Pornographers know that if they can get their images seen, a certain percentage of those exposed to them will not turn their eyes away, but will instead be enticed to want to see more. Once this decision is made, some of these men and women will begin the devastating descent into pornography addiction. And even those not addicted will be affected in ways that they would never have imagined.

When one considers the devastating effects of pornography on those engaged in its production, those who view it, and those affected by someone's pornography addiction, it is clear that there should be no room in a person's life for pornography. In his letter to the Philippians, the Apostle Paul offers guidance that can help Christians build into themselves the tools they need to resist the enticing lure of pornography.

Call on a member to read Philippians 4:4-9.

Say: As the apostle Paul brought his letter to the Christians in Philippi to a close, he urged on them certain attitudes that would help them as they were dealing with various internal and external problems. He called on them to rejoice in the Lord (4:4), to be gentle (4:5), not to be anxious (4:6), and to focus their minds on things that edify (4:8). He also called them to follow his own example of holy living (4:9). As they became such Christians, Paul assured them that the peace of God would be their great benefit. This peace would be personal and corporate in nature. They would experience personal peace as they focused on God rather than their problems (4:7), and they would experience peace in their fellowship as the God of peace dwelt among them (4:9). We are going to focus our attention on Paul's guidance in verse 8. It contains some important guidelines that can help us resist the lure of pornography.

Ask: What does Paul tell the Philippians to do with these things he mentions?

He says to think about such things.

Say: What Paul had in mind was much more than some casual acquaintance with the things he mentioned. The word translated "think" means more than to simply ponder something. It means to "ever take account of them as what they are and never appropriate any but these" (R. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Galatians, Ephesians, and Philippians*, p. 884).

Ask: Why does Paul want them to think about these things?

(Refer to the first point in the Sermon and Bible Study Notes section of this guide for a discussion of the importance of the mind.)

Say: So, the beginning point in our personal defense against pornography is our mind. Now, let's look at what Paul told the Philippians to think about.

Ask: What words does he use to describe the things they should think about?

(Make a list of the words.)

Say: These words have very definite meanings.

(Share with the members the meanings of these words from the second point in the Sermon and Bible Study Notes section of this guide.)

Say: Obviously, Paul believed that it was possible to make a distinction between good and bad things. He believed in what we call universal standards of right and wrong, the belief that some things are good and others are bad by their nature, regardless of what anybody thinks. And Paul told the Philippians that they were to be guided by these standards of right and wrong.

Ask: How is pornography contrary to the kinds of things Paul told the Philippians to think about?

Let the members talk about this for a while. Make sure the conversation remains appropriate.

Say: So, pornography does not qualify as something good. There is one more component in what Paul says to the Philippians.

Ask: If pornography is not morally good, what should be our response to it?

We should not participate in it in any way.

Say: This is where the real battle comes in. We must give our attention to what is moral. Paul describes the things the Philippians should think about as “excellent” or “praiseworthy.” And it is important to notice that he changes the sentence structure when he adds these two characteristics.

Ask: What is the change in the language Paul uses when he introduces these two characteristics?

He shifts from using the word “whatever” to using the word “if”.

(Refer to the third point in the Sermon and Bible Study Notes section of this guide for a discussion of the importance of this word change.)

Say: Paul expected these Christians to make a conscious choice about what to give their attention to. There are such things as moral absolutes. Some things are just moral, and some are immoral. These are intrinsic characteristics, not determined by the beholder. In other words, beauty is not always in the eye of the beholder when it comes to morality. God decides what is moral and immoral; and if a person desires to please God, he will assess the morality of an object based on God’s standards, not his own. Then, having made this spiritual assessment, the Christian must make the conscious decision to pay attention only to that which is moral in God’s eyes.

Ask: Now that we understand Paul’s instructions to the Philippians, is there any possible way that a Christian can justify looking at pornography?

Ask: How have Paul’s instructions to the Philippians helped you to equip yourself to resist the temptation to view pornography?

Say: That’s very good. Let’s apply Paul’s guidance this week and talk about how well it worked when we meet next time.