

Fil-Am Community Church  
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“THINK RIGHT, LIVE RIGHT, A LOOK BACK, A LOOK FORWARD”

My name is Pastor Chris Ireland and I would like to thank Pastor’s Rolly and David for allowing me to share with you today. Today is the last Sunday of 2013, and as we come to the close of another year, I would like us to look back over the last year. If you look at the front of your bulletin, you will see that the theme for 2013 is “Think Right. Live Right” and the verses are from Philippians 4:8-9: “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. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me-put into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.” I would like to share a little about right thinking AND right living. This is a message to embrace not only for today, but for 2014 and beyond.

A husband and wife were sitting on their front porch rocking after dinner. The husband was thinking to himself “We have been married over 50 years now. When we first got married, we had no money, but you stuck

with me. When I changed jobs, you encouraged me. You cooked my dinners and cleaned my clothes without complaining. You raised our kids into happy and healthy adults. You were there to take care of things when I was away. There is no better woman in the whole world.” He thought how lucky he was, looked over at his wife, and said “I love you.” She looked back at him and said “I’m tired of you, too.”

Our thoughts affect our words and actions. If we go into KFC and see a long line when we are in a hurry, we become impatient and can act inconvenienced. If someone is rude to us, we can assume they are an unpleasant person and can become unpleasant in our interaction with them. On the other hand, if we drop something and a stranger stops to pick it up, we become thankful for the help and share a smile...a thank you...and a have a nice day.

So, how do we make right thinking a part of our lives? Is this something we choose on our own? Does it just take willpower and dedication? What is “the secret?” There are three things I want to share with you that will change, and continue to change, our attitudes; righteousness, thankfulness, and humility.

There is a book called *When Helping Hurts* by Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert. Steve relates a story about his daughter Anna when she was three years old. As was their habit, they prayed before bed. This particular night, she prayed “Dear Jesus, please come back soon, because we have lots of owies, and they hurt.” This simple 3-year-old prayer captured the essence of righteousness. This is the Lord’s Prayer in 3-year-old language when Jesus says “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven” (Matthew 6:10, KJV). This is the first secret to “right thinking, right living.” - righteousness.

When God created us, He created us to be in fellowship with Him. We see this fellowship in Heaven and between God and man in Genesis 1:26-27 where it says “Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, after our likeness, so they may rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move on the earth.” God created humankind in His own image, in the image of God He created them, male and female He created them” (NIV). This fellowship was broken, and ever since God has been making a way for man to have a relationship with God again. It again says in the Bible that “So as one sin of Adam brought the punishment of death to all people, one good

act that Christ did makes all people right with God. And that brings true life for all” (Romans 5:18, NCV).

See, God made man to enjoy Him and enjoy each other. He did this out of love. 1 John 4:8 says “The person who does not love does not know God, because God is love” (NET). This love, this fellowship is what led God to created man. It did not come out of obligation or design, it came out of love.

I once heard the story told of a woman who was at her husband’s funeral. She stood over the casket and was softly crying. A pastor came and stood beside her. As he was standing there, she said “I have struggled with my weight ever since we had our first child. I used to ask my husband if he thought I was fat, and he always told me the same thing; “you look good to me, babe.” I know I was fat, and sometimes it would bother me when he would say that, “you look good to me, babe.” I sure loved that man, and I am going to miss him.”

When I heard this story, I related to the husband. I truly believe that this husband did not see a fat wife or overweight woman or anything else...other than the beautiful woman he married however many years ago. This is love. This is what God sees when He sees us. He created us for

fellowship with Him and each other, and wants us to have a right relationship with Him so we can once again have fellowship with God.

When Jesus was on the earth, He looked out over the city and the people He came to save who did not want that fellowship. He said “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones God’s messengers! How often I have wanted to gather your children together as a hen protects her chicks beneath her wings, but you wouldn’t let me” (Matthew 23:37, NLT). God is love, God loves us, and God wants us to love each other as He loves us. This right thinking begins with a right relationship with God. When we are right with God, He renews our mind c.f. Romans 12:2 and our thoughts, actions, and relationships with other people improve, because we see other people as God sees them.

Thankfulness is the second secret to changing our thoughts and actions. Several years ago, there was a saying in church circles “let’s put on an attitude of gratitude.” It sounded a little silly, but there is a lot of truth in this statement. Throughout the Bible we see encouragements to be thankful and examples of thankfulness. “In everything give thanks” (1 Thessalonians 5:18), “O give thanks to the LORD for He is good” (Psalms 107:1), Ephesians

5:20, Colossians 4:2, and many others. This begs the question, how can we be thankful “in everything?” Is it even possible?

Many of Paul’s letters contain admonitions to be thankful. However, Paul acknowledges there are times he despaired. In Paul’s 2 letter to the Corinthians, he starts the second paragraph with: “For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, regarding the affliction that happened to us in the province of Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of living” (2 Corinthians 1:8, NET). In 2 Timothy 1:15 Paul writes: “You know that everyone in the province of Asia deserted me, including Phygelus and Hermogenes” (NET). These two were people that Paul counted on to be loyal to him, and they deserted him. The weariness and despair are evident in 2 Corinthians; the sense of betrayal is seen in 2 Timothy. The reason Paul can be thankful, and how we can have an attitude of thankfulness, is seen in who Paul was.

Remember that Paul was a Jew, Pharisee, and well-versed in the Hebrew Scriptures, our Old Testament c.f. Philippians 3:5. He would have known the Old Testament, believed its words, and lived according to the Old Testament Law. The book of Psalms contains a type of Psalm called laments.

These Psalms contained cries to God for action, for justice, for vengeance to the persecutions and perceived unfairness of life. Psalm 3 is an example:

LORD, how numerous are my enemies!  
Many attack me.  
Many say about me,  
“God will not deliver him.”  
But you, LORD, are a shield that protects me;  
You are my glory and the one who restores me.  
To the LORD I cried out,  
And He answered me from his holy hill.  
I rested and slept;  
I awoke, for the LORD protects me.  
I am not afraid of the multitude of people  
Who attack me from all directions.  
Rise up, LORD!  
Deliver me, my God!  
Yes, you will strike all my enemies on the jaw;  
You will break the teeth of the wicked.  
The LORD delivers;  
You show favor to your people.

Paul knew that thankfulness to God was in these Psalms, and was seen in all lives’ circumstances...all of them! These Psalms do not ignore the troubles of life or minimize the pain, instability, and uncertainty. They recognize the troubles...and they also recognize God’s in control through these circumstances. And there is a thankfulness for God’s presence; and there is nowhere one can go or any circumstance that can separate us from God’s

presence c.f. Psalm 139:7, Romans 8:38-39. Paul had learned this, and knew this to be true.

Paul also knew that this attitude of thankfulness brought a peace that changes our reactions to troubles, because he had a relationship with God through Jesus. Philippians 4:6-7 says: “Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (KJV). Therefore, this “attitude of gratitude” can lead us into right living by realizing God is in control. Nothing happens by accident or chance. Nothing is given to us that we cannot bear c.f. 1 Corinthians 10:13.

William Cowper on his way in a cab to the Thames River to commit suicide, who, when the driver could not find it for the dense fog, returned to his house and thanking God for the fog, wrote:

God moves in a mysterious way,  
His wonders to perform;  
He plants His footsteps on the sea,  
And rides upon the storm.

Blind unbelief is sure to err,  
And scan His works in vain;  
God is His own interpreter,  
And He will make it plain.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,  
But trust Him for His grace;  
Behind a frowning providence  
He hides a smiling face.”

Think right with thankfulness to God, know He’s in control, and let that peace show forth to others.

This brings me to my last point. If we want to live right, think humbly. In other words, think of others more highly than yourself. Put other people first. Philippians 2:3-4 says “Instead of being motivated by selfish ambition or vanity, each of you should, in humility, be moved to treat one another as more important than yourself. Each of you should be concerned not only about your own interests, but about the interests of others as well” (NET).

This sounds simple...and it is. But why then does it seem so hard to do that? Let me share two examples of how humility works in real life.

Lincoln once got caught up in a situation where he wanted to please a politician, so he issued a command to transfer certain regiments. When the secretary of war, Edwin Stanton, received the order, he refused to carry it out. He said that the President was a fool. Lincoln was told what Stanton had said, and he replied, "If Stanton said I'm a fool, then I must be, for he is nearly always right. I'll see for myself." As the two men talked, the President

quickly realized that his decision was a serious mistake, and without hesitation he withdrew it.

This is treating one another as more important than yourself. The following story appeared in *The Daily Bread* and shows how to be concerned about the interests of others.

Booker T. Washington, the renowned black educator, was an outstanding example of this truth. Shortly after he took over the presidency of Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, he was walking in an exclusive section of town when he was stopped by a wealthy white woman. Not knowing the famous Mr. Washington by sight, she asked if he would like to earn a few dollars by chopping wood for her. Because he had no pressing business at the moment, Professor Washington smiled, rolled up his sleeves, and proceeded to do the humble chore she had requested. When he was finished, he carried the logs into the house and stacked them by the fireplace. A little girl recognized him and later revealed his identity to the lady.

The next morning the embarrassed woman went to see Mr. Washington in his office at the Institute and apologized profusely. "It's perfectly all right, Madam," he replied. "Occasionally I enjoy a little manual labor. Besides, it's always a delight to do something for a friend." She shook his hand warmly

and assured him that his meek and gracious attitude had endeared him and his work to her heart. Not long afterward she showed her admiration by persuading some wealthy acquaintances to join her in donating thousands of dollars to the Tuskegee Institute.

Think right, live right starts with a right relationship with God...a renewed mind. When God renews our minds, we can see people as God sees them...people who God loves and values. And if God values them, then we should, too.

Thankfulness focuses our minds away from what we don't have and onto what we do have in Christ. We have troubles, we have loss, we have pain, we have disappointments; but when we remember to thank God for his care, concern, presence, and protection...our attitude changes. Worry is replaced with peace, fear is replaced with assurance, and anger is replaced with joy.

An attitude of humility makes us see other people as important and worthy. Romans 12:3 says "do not think you are better than you are." "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve" c.f. Mark 10:45, NIV.

Righteousness, thankfulness, and humility; these are the foundations for right thinking which will lead to right living. As we close out 2013, let's remember what we have accomplished, and "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."

Let's Pray...