

"Thinking...to the Glory of God"

Philippians 4:8-9

May 3, 2026

One of the aspects of life that has been really fun for me recently is watching my son gain some new valuable life skills. I'm thankful for other men that have been investing in him in ways that will serve him for the rest of his life, whether its various skills working on the farm, working on cars, training for his CDL, getting a small business started, or smoking meat.

Life skills are not only part of God's provision for us, but they also poise us to serve God by serving people in unique ways. And of all the possible life skills that we could attain or pass on to our kids, there is one that surpasses the value of all others whether being able to cook, navigate technology, budget our money and time, or even communicate effectively. The most important life skill for us to attain and steward is the ability to discern the motivations of our heart and discipline our mind to think according to what is true. How else can we truly walk with God?

We talk a lot about the *heart* around here, but today we are going to focus on the *mind*. Our main text will be Philippians 4:8-9 but I will also attempt to help us consider a theology of the mind from the broader context of the NT as well. **[Phil 4:8-9]**

In a few minutes we will dig into the various Christlike qualities that are to govern what we set our mind on in vs. 8, but first let's begin with a couple general observations in vs. 8.

First, take note that this is positive command. Not only are all the qualities that are to govern our thinking positive, but the heart of the command is also positive—"think on these things." What are Christians to do? They are to *think*! Think on good things in ways that are profitable.

Second, don't overlook all the seemingly less significant words in vs. 8. Six times Paul uses the word "whatever." And twice he uses the word "any" or "anything." Together the 8 uses of the words "whatever...any...anything" in one verse create an incredibly broad scope of opportunity for our thinking. This is not narrow-mindedness. This is a call to use our minds liberally within the realm of all that is virtuous. Think about *whatever* is true, honorable, or just. Think about *whatever* is pure, lovely, or commendable. Think about anything that is excellent or worthy of praise. Put your mind to it! Consider, ponder, meditate on these things!

The Value of the Mind

There are so many valuable things you can use your mind for in the realm of godliness:

- Solving problems
- Contributing new thought to various fields of study
- Gaining and sharing insight
- Serving people in creative and more helpful ways

One of the greatest gifts God has given you to steward is your mind, especially when it is under the influence of the Holy Spirit!

Young people, what will you apply your mind to?

- Medicine
- Technology
- Theology
- Apologetics
- Education
- Construction
- Engineering
- Law and justice
- Counseling

- Agriculture
- Language study
- history
- Art & music
- Business and economics
- Etc. (the list is endless)

While there's an endless list, all Christians need to give their minds to thinking right thoughts about God (theology). Not necessarily formal theological education but learning to think right thoughts about God from the Bible because most of our battles in life are battles of the mind.

Furthermore, every other area of thought is a subset to theology, because God is the designer of all things whether mathematics, music, zoology, or astronomy.

Christians must be thinkers—people of mind and heart that reflect God's wisdom in this world. Because of our access to the Spirit of God and the truth of God, believers have a unique capacity to contribute to all branches of wisdom and learning because they see all things in relationship to God as Creator, Sustainer, and Finisher of all things. It doesn't necessarily mean we are smarter, but we have access to true wisdom so that our meditations in any field of study can result in doxology. We must think to the glory of God!

If vs. 8 limits the Christian's thinking to exclude things that are not true, honorable, just or pure (etc.), it is limiting us so as not to waste our minds on things that are unworthy of God's glory. There are so many things we can waste our minds on—negativity, pessimism, perversion, godless speculations, mindless scrolling...etc.

Few things in life will be more defining and influential on the direction of your life than what influences your mind.

Prov 23:7 – As a man thinks in his heart, so he is.

It would be hard to overstate the value of the mind. This prompts us to ask the question, "what is the supreme purpose of the mind?"

The Supreme Purpose of the Mind (Mt 22:37-38)

The ultimate, God-given purpose for our mind is not different than the purpose of life. The goal of all of life is to glorify God, to make much of God, to see and savor and celebrate the worth and beauty of who He is and all that He has done as Creator and Redeemer. 1Cor 10:31 says, "*Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.*" In Philippians, it sounds like this: "*that now as always, Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life for by death. For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain.*" This is the goal of life, to honor the supreme worth of God and find our joy and satisfaction in Christ who has redeemed us to have fellowship with Him—this is life.

So it's not surprising then, that Jesus said, the first and greatest command is to love God with all of our heart, soul, *mind*, and strength. The point that Jesus is making here is that we are to love God with the totality of our being—including our mind as well as our heart and strength. We are to focus every faculty of our being on loving and honoring God as the supreme treasure of life. This includes setting apart our mind as a sanctuary to think God-honoring thoughts. This will influence how we view any particular branch of study. For example:

- *History* - fingerprint of God's providence
- *Chemistry* or *biology* - fingerprint of God's design ("Fearfully and Wonderfully Made")
- *Music* - what is the purpose of music but to glorify God (worship)—to delight the heart and soul in God!

- *Language* - we don't think right thoughts about God or relate to Him apart from language.
- *Law, justice, criminology* - where does a sense of justice come from. We must consider these things because sin has diverted the human heart away from God's righteousness.

All learning and all of life is influenced by our theology, whether our theology is good or bad.

A.W. Tozer: "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us" (*The Knowledge of the Holy*).

John Piper, in his book entitled "Think: The Life of the Mind and the Love of God," writes:

"The main reason God has given us minds is that we might seek out and find all the reasons that exist for treasuring Him *in* all things and *above* all things. He created the world so that through it and above it we might treasure Him....And the more we treasure Him, the more He is consciously and joyfully glorified."¹

The purpose of your mind is to discover more and more reasons to be in awe of God, that you might love Him supremely and that He might be glorified supremely for who He is. But the problem is that this does not happen automatically because of the corrupting influence of sin on the mind.

The Corrupting Influence of Sin on the Mind (1Cor 2:14; 1Tim 1:15; Rom 8:7-8)

In theology we use the term "depravity" to refer to the fact there is no aspect of a person that has not come under the corrupting influence of sin. This includes our minds.

- 1Tim 1:15 - "To those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled."
- Jer 17:9 - "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately corrupt; Who can *understand* it?"
- In Eph 4:17-18 Paul says that unbelievers walk in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding
- Romans 8:7-8 - "For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; Indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God."
- 1Cor 2:14 - "A natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned."

The corrupting influence of sin on the mind is the very reason Paul had to tell us in Phil 4:8 to use our minds to dwell on that which is true, honorable, and pure. Therefore, we need our mind to be renewed and sanctified.

The Need for the Mind to be Renewed/Sanctified (Rom 12:2; Eph 4:17-24; Col 3:10)

A sanctified mind is the mind described in Phil 4:8—a mind that meditates on things that are true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, virtuously excellent, and worthy praise because they are a fitting response to God's character. This is the way God thinks. This is a description of the character of Christ. So, let's take a closer look at these qualities that are to govern what we meditate on:

- **True** - What is true? Not just in terms of facts or information, but what aligns with God's thoughts and values on a particular matter. Be on the alert for subtle or blatant lies in your thinking.

¹ John Piper, *Think: The Life of the Mind and the Love of God*, pg. 15-16.

- **Honorable** – This is the opposite of that which is irreverent. That which is honorable is that which is worthy of contemplation in a spirit of worship. Thoughts that can be uttered before God without embarrassment.
- **Right/Just** – Consistent with God’s righteousness. This includes a sense of fairness in keeping with God’s law. This would suggest being on guard for thinking that is partial, self-serving or vindictive. Are my thought processes taking into consideration what is in the best interests of others before God?
- **Pure** – This is holy or morally clean. Not meditating on that which is impure, perverted, or corrupt.
- **Lovely** – These are thoughts that are pleasing or attractive in God’s sight. There is probably also a sense in which we are to take note of what is beautiful by God’s design in the world around us and in each other’s lives. Do you tend to concentrate on the beauty you see in others or rather critique the imperfections or flaws of others. Does God’s beauty in our world lead your heart to praise or go unnoticed.
- **Commendable** – This has to do with seeing and affirming the good in others or one’s circumstances. An unsanctified mind leans toward pessimism while a sanctified mind rejoices and gives thanks for any evidences of God’s good graces in others or circumstances. Dwelling on the commendable is the opposite of grumbling.
- **Excellence** – This word has to do with virtue or exceptional character. Older theologians referred to the perfections of Christ’s character as the excellencies of Christ.
- **Worthy of praise** – That which is worthy of recognition. Are the things I am dwelling on things that God would consider praiseworthy because of their goodness?

Wouldn’t it be great if these were the qualities that our mind consistently gravitated toward? But this is not the way we

automatically think most of the time, so our minds need to be renewed.

Rom 12:2 – “And do not be conformed to this world, but be *transformed by the renewing of your mind*, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.”

Any true change, any true reform or transformation in one’s life must begin with a change of thinking. Repentance itself is a change of mind about our sin and about God’s rightful place in our lives. We cannot ultimately change our behavior without addressing our need to think differently about the desires and motivations of our heart.

Eph 4:17-24 – “¹⁷ Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, *in the futility of their minds*.¹⁸ They are *darkened in their understanding*, alienated from the life of God because of the *ignorance* that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. ¹⁹ They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. ²⁰ But that is not the way you learned Christ!– ²¹ assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, ²² to put off your old self,^[a] which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, ²³ and to *be renewed in the spirit of your minds*, ²⁴ and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

What is the key to putting off the old self and putting on the new self? The renewal of our minds!

Col 3:10 reiterates Ephesians 4 by saying that the new self which replaces the old self in the process of sanctification, is “renewed in knowledge after the image of its Creator.” In other words, the renewing of our minds to think true thoughts about God and to

think His thoughts about ourselves and our world, is how the image of God is restored within us.

And what informs the renewing of our minds? God's word. We fill our minds with God's truth. We replace what we think and say with what *God* thinks and says.

Isaiah 55:7 says, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts." And how do we forsake them? We replace them with God's thoughts—we think His thoughts after Him—which are higher than our thoughts in as much as the heavens are higher than the earth (Isa 55:9).

As we read and meditate on God's word it begins to transform our thinking. As we hide God's word in our hearts by memorizing it, it becomes a defense system that the Holy Spirit uses to guard our hearts and correct our wayward habits. And little by little, God's truth begins to transform our worldview, reshape our desires and motivations, and empower new ways of living, behaving, and relating. This is the process of sanctification.

So what happens if we don't engage in the battle to renew our minds?

The Danger of an Unsanctified Mind (Rom 1:18-28)

The danger of an unsanctified mind is that regardless of our awareness of the truth, we will continue to live in the direction of corruption that becomes more and more hostile toward God. Those who do not heed the call to renew their minds become like those in Roman 1 who, although they knew God, did not honor Him as God with grateful hearts. Thus, they became futile in their thinking and exchanged the truth of God for a lie, resulting in dark, foolish hearts. The danger of an undisciplined mind is that we may know what is

true, yet suppress the truth with stubborn humanistic thinking that comes naturally to our human flesh.

A polluted mind will lead to a polluted heart and life. Every thought is a seed that will naturally bear the fruit of its kind if left in the soil of your heart. But 2Cor 10 calls us to a higher road—the pursuit of a disciplined mind.

The Power of a Disciplined Mind (2Cor 10:3-5)

The value of a disciplined life in general is hard to exaggerate. Paul told Timothy, "Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness. For while bodily discipline is of some value, godliness is of value in every way" (1Tim 4:7). More important than being disciplined in your diet, or disciplined in your spending or time management, is being disciplined in your thinking. We need to be disciplined in our thinking about God, ourselves, others, and our general worldview and culture.

2Cor 10:3-5 - "For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ..." (2Cor 10:3-5).

The first thing I want you to notice here is that renewing our minds is a spiritual battle. You cannot renew your mind by passively reading the Bible or passively listening to a sermon. You need to take the truth of God's word and assault the strongholds in your mind that defend godless thinking. How do you do this?

1. **Interrogate your own thoughts.** Sometimes it helps to actually verbalize what we are thinking. We interrogate our thoughts against the standard of God's character, how He

has instructed us in His word, and if our thinking is redemptive (gospel flavored). Remember, the heart is more deceitful than all else (Jer 17:9), so the best way to interrogate your heart is to allow a mature brother or sister in Christ help you hold your thoughts up to the light.

For example, you might examine your thoughts by asking:

- Is my thinking true, or have I given in to some subtle lies? Lies like, God is not committed to my good. Or God is not willing to help me.
- Are my thoughts reflective of God's character or just my present feelings about my circumstances? Am I interpreting my situation through the lens of God's goodness and faithfulness and His sanctifying work in my own heart?
- Is my thinking redemptive? Am I clinging to hope in my thoughts by trusting in God? Am I leaving room for God to work? Or am I telling myself that the other person is hopeless and will never change, rather than rejoicing in God's ability to change human hearts and redeem painful situations?

As we interrogate our thoughts, we must especially watch for:

- Critical attitudes of others
- Pessimism or cynical thinking
- Self-loathing thoughts: *"I just can't do anything right. I'll never be good enough."*
- Self-defensive thoughts or self-justifications
- Proud thoughts that assume my understanding of a matter is superior or inscrutable.

2. **Recall to mind what is true from God's perspective.**

Identify the discrepancy between your thoughts and God's truth. This is essential if you are going to correct your errant thinking with what is true regarding God's character, His ability to intervene, His redemptive ways, and His call for you to walk by faith rather than by sight. This is how we destroy strongholds of lofty opinions (proud thoughts) that have taken their stand to challenge the knowledge of God.

Be very careful of the notion that walking by faith is somehow opposed to rational thinking. Reflecting on Matt 6 where Jesus commanded us not to worry, D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones says,

"Faith...is primarily thinking....The trouble with most people, however, is that they will not think. Instead...they sit down and ask, 'What is going to happen to me? What can I do?' This is the absence of thought; it is surrender; it is defeat. Our Lord [in Matt 6] is urging us to think in a Christian manner. That is the very essence of faith. The problem with the person of little faith is that, instead of controlling his own thought, his thought is being controlled by something else, and...he goes round and round in circles. That is the essence of worry...a failure to think [biblically].²

In other words, worry is the result of not taking our thoughts captive to obey Christ. Walking by faith, on the other hand, involves strategic biblical thinking.

² D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones quoted by John MacArthur, *The MacArthur NT Commentary: Philippians*, pg. 288.

3. **Take your thoughts captive to obey Christ.** Insist that your mind repeatedly turns back to what is true, honorable, and redemptive from a biblical perspective.

The power of a disciplined mind that takes your thoughts captive to obey Christ is experiencing Spirit-empowered change and leading your mind and your choices to respond redemptively with hope and faith in God. And as a result, we become instruments of change in God's hand. *Discerning and disciplining your mind according to God's word is the most important life skill because it leads to spiritual maturity, life transformation, and fruitful living.*

The Excellence of a Humble Mind (1Cor 8:1; Rom 12:3)

Let me just add that as we steward our minds according to Philippians 4:8 and we learn to take our thoughts captive to obey Christ, one of the most essential aspects of a disciplined mind is a *humble* mind. In the words of John Piper, "*I would encourage you to think, but not to be too impressed with yourself when you do.*"³ In Rom 12, must after Paul commanded us to renew our minds, he went on to instruct us to not think of ourselves more highly than we ought but to think with sober judgment (Rom 12:3).

The Bible encourages the pursuit of knowledge and wisdom, but it also warns us that knowledge has a tendency to make us proud— "knowledge puffs up self, but love builds up others (1Cor 8:1). The stewardship of our minds should lead to trembling and awe before God as we forsake our sinful thoughts and stand amazed that His thoughts and His wisdom exceed our human understanding in as much as the heavens are higher than the earth.

The Insufficiency of the Mind as an End in Itself (Phil 4:9)

This brings us back to **[Philippians 4:9]**. If vs. 8 is about *thinking*, then vs. 9 is about *doing*. Paul is calling the Philippians to not only honor God with redeemed thinking, but to also follow his example as he demonstrates a life of faith in which he could say, "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain." Paul is calling them to not only be hearers of the word but also doers of the word (James 1:22).

Vs. 9 ends with a remarkable promise: "When your thoughts align with Christ's character (8), and your life demonstrates truth faith in gospel living (9), *the God of peace will be with you.*"

All of us want God's peace. But before you can live in God's peace, you need to lead your heart and mind into His truth and presence. When we pursue God in truth, we will discover that He indeed is with us and that there is peace in His presence.

Communion

Psalm 139: 1-7, 23-24

Bread & Cup: Isa 55:7-9 - Let the wicked forsake his way, And the unrighteous man his thoughts; And let him return to the LORD, And He will have compassion on him; And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon.

8 "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Neither are your ways My ways," declares the LORD.

9 "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts.

³ John Piper, *Think: The Life of the Mind and the Love of God*, pg.17.