

Re-Thinking What We Think

Philippians 4:8-9

*"If there is anything worthy of praise, **think** about these things"*

Introduction: One of the realities of growing up is gaining confidence in decision making, in who we are, and what we are doing. This confidence is forged over time, often through mistakes and learning from those mistakes, with the result being a settled, steady, and stable life. This is why it was important for Erin and I to have mature people in our life as we made decisions about the future, or started to raise our kids, or faced trials in the furnace of God's refinement process. We would talk to our parents or others who had already walked a path before us and they would give calming advice since they had *experienced* God's grace and now could say "its going to be ok". We find ourselves giving the same advice to new parents now or young people making decisions for life. In reflecting on this process, a few things stand out: 1) **There is a way to live now that will lead to stability in the future** 2) **No matter the advice and wisdom given, each person needs to experience life in order to gain wisdom for themselves** 3) **Maturity is a goal for every believer, and confidence breeds fruitfulness and effectiveness.**

*"to equip the saints for the work of ministry...until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, **to mature manhood**, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we **may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.**"*

Eph. 4:12-14

Part of maturity is no longer being tossed about. Its the same thing Paul said in Philippians 4:1, that we would **stand firm, stable** in the Lord, so that we'd be effective in this world. We have looked at ways that plays out over the last few weeks: we are able to *work out conflict by thinking in the Lord, rejoice in the Lord* regardless of circumstances, responds *graciously* even when we are treated poorly, and **battle** our *anxiety* through prayer with thanksgiving, knowing that the peace of God will guard us supernaturally in Christ Jesus. Stability in **relationships, in outlook, expectations, the future, and our inability to control** are marks of maturity. *But how do we actually grow in these areas.* Two consistent themes throughout Scripture address this, and Paul majors on them now: **how & what we think, and then practicing what we have concluded.**

So this morning we are going to focus on our **thinking**, the place of our mind in our life with Jesus, and how our understanding leads to consistently and relentlessly living out the truth, producing a stable maturity.

Standing Firm Engages In the Battlefield of our Mind (8)

*Finally brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, **think about these things.***

Tying all of this together by the word "*finally*", Paul used a different word for *mind* or *thinking* than he'd used throughout the book. He has used the word *froneo* 10 times, and not he used a word that does not simply mean think or concern or agree, but means to "*contemplate, to take account of, evaluate*". The call to think was an active command, meaning engaging our mind and thinking is **imperative** to our march toward maturity.

This is important for us to remember. Over the years I have talked with many folks who think about their life in Christ and in His church as one that is focused on **emotional experience** over an engagement of the mind. Faith becomes romanticized, not connecting with every aspect of life, or becomes entertainment based becoming a meme for inspiration. When this happens in mass, the church will lack the ability to think critically and will become anti-intellectual, devolving into a place where short attention spans are satisfied and opinions are elevated. Churches that then focus on "what works" and offering "what people want" will be full, but not effective. **Why?** Faith is not a disengagement of our mind but rather the clearing up of the fog that covered it so we can live with understanding. Faith is NOT DEVOID of **emotion or experience** but *inflamed hearts always come out of informed minds in worship*. In other words there is an intertwined reality that how we **think determines how we live**, and when we fail to think Biblically, there is no understanding or ability to live life in light of the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Its interesting to see how pastors and churches have strategized to reach people, especially young people in the "short attention span" days we live in. We want students to understand Physics, Literature, and Calculus, call them to be disciplined in sports and drama productions, but when it comes to understanding of God's Word we treat them like simpletons, putting the cookies on the lowest shelf, giving more in terms of a show rather than connecting with their minds. We then wonder why the next generation believes that faith in Christ and the Bible must not be that important since the substance must not matter.

This morning we want to "reason together" (Isaiah 1:18). The Bible was given to us as special revelation that we can understand. We want to re-think how and what we think about so that we can move toward stable maturity. "A *thinking Christian should be a redundancy, not an oxymoron.*" Al Mohler

The place of the Mind in the Christian Life

The gospel is a set of information that comes to us verbally or through the written word to connect first with our mind and then our hearts. The Bible talks much about our minds, before we are saved, in our salvation, and what our minds are like in Christ. Each of these is important to understand in our path of maturity.

Pre-Conversion minds:

Depraved and deprived of the truth -

"And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a **debased mind** to do what out not be done." **Rom. 1:28** (they also suppress the truth (1:18))

"And constant friction among people who are **depraved in mind and deprived of the truth** imagining that godliness is a means of gain." **1 Tim. 6:5**

Hostile toward God -

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." **Rom. 8:7** (cf. Col 1:21 - alienated from God)

Foolish and unable to Understand --

The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are **folly to him**, and **he is not able to understand them** because they are spiritually discerned." **1 Cor. 2:14**

Hardened to Truth -

*But their **minds are hardened**. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because **only through Christ is it taken away.**" 2 Cor. 3:14*

Blind -

*In their case the god of this world has **blinded the minds of unbelievers** to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." 2 Cor. 4:4*

Futile and Ignorant -

*"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**. 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." Eph. 4:17-18*

Defiled -

*To the pure all things are pure, but to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their **minds and consciences are defiled.**" Titus 1:15*

That's a bleak look at our minds. Before we are saved and given new minds we are depraved, hostile, foolish, darkened, blinded, futile, ignorant and defiled in our thinking. A good summary of this is the fact that we CANNOT comprehend the truth on our own but are dependent on something from outside of us changing us inside. God's grace is what moves dead things to life, giving faith as a gift and lifting the veil. Faith comes from hearing, and hearing from God's Word (Rom. 10:17). The gospel changes our MINDS.

Gospel infused minds:

When Jesus met two men on the road to Emmaus after His resurrection, they were reeling, sad, and confused. They did not recognize the man they talked to was Jesus Himself. How did Jesus recapture their heart and mind? Did He give an emotional speech or an experiential exercise to buoy up their faith? Nope. He connected with their mind. "**And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.**" (Luke 24:27). Their response? "**Did not our hearts burn within us while He talked to us on the road, while He opened to us the Scriptures?**" (Luke 24:32)

The good news of the gospel, work of Jesus on the cross and resurrection, and work of the Spirit gives sight to the blind (Luke 4:18), allows us to see our sin in light of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23) and repent of our sin (Rom 2:4). Faith is not a leap into the unknown, it is believing in what is real, even though we do not see. It is coming to a knowledge of the truth so that we can act in reality for the first time. And salvation then **unlocks a new mindset** (same brain) **for the first time**.

Post-Conversion minds:

Now we are free in our minds to **think differently**, to grow in wisdom, and to see reality.

We **Worship truly for the first time** - (John 4:24) - Worship in spirit and TRUTH, with inflamed hearts through informed minds.

Our minds are **TRANSFORMED** (Rom. 12:2) and **RENEWED:**

*"Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the **renewal of your mind**, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.*

- **Our minds are set now on the Spirit, not the flesh** (Rom. 8:5-6)
- We see **Jesus as our greatest WISDOM** (1 Cor. 1:30), and we can because we have been given the "mind of Christ" (1 Cor. 2:16). We still have the same brains but now have the capacity to see truth, like receiving new lenses (spiritual Lasik?) to truly understand what we never could
- We can truly **love God with our minds** (Matthew 22:37)
- We can **put off sin and put on righteousness through the renewing of our mind** (Eph. 4:23)
- We can **prepare our minds for action** (1 Pet. 1:13)
- We can **set our minds where they belong, on things above** (Col. 3:2)

All of this is good news, the fact that we can enjoy and engage our minds in a new way. But what do we think about?

The focus of the Mind in what we think about

Dr. Walter Cavert reported a survey on worry that indicated that only 8% of the things people worried about were true matters of concern, where 92% were either imaginary, never happened, or involved matters over which people had no control.¹ Satan is a liar (John 8:44), who seeks to deceive, twist, and move us down a road where we are not sure what or who to trust. This is exactly what he did with Eve in the Garden (Genesis 3:1ff), twisting the Truth in a way that made sin seem good, right, and justifiable. That is why Jesus guards our minds and hearts, since the battle for so much begins and ends there.

Two principles stand out here. **First**, the list he offers is not *exhaustive* and it is not necessarily distinctly Christian. There is a strong rhetorical tone here, where Paul writes with a rhythm, repeating the phrase "whatever is" over and over, and using the last two phrases to reinforce the first six. It is the excellence and worthy of praise that help see the first grouping in light of **Christ, rather than moralistic phrases**. The focus is on what is true, fighting against those things that are untrue or only partially true. Things that are worthy of respect, right, pure, inherently lovely to God, and what is highly regarded are things to cling to. It is **training our minds to see reality through the lens of God's truth, not through the fuzzy picture deception paints**.

Secondly, how do we begin to cultivate this type of thinking? How do we see the beauty of Christ in a broken world? How do we think purely in the midst of deception around us? How do we dwell on what is excellent and worthy of praise? The answer is that all of these areas should lead us to think about the beauty of Christ, and its dwelling on Christ that drives us to think clearly in all of life. How do we know what is true? That is where the Word of God comes in:

"The Law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether." Psalm 19:7-9

Six descriptions of God's Word, and six results of investing in it. How do we think in a way that is blameless, sure, right, pure, clean, and true? We must saturate our minds in God's Word, marinating on what is true and real. This is not only how we gain stability, we mature and settle ourselves.

The cultivation of the Mind in everyday life

¹ Warren W. Wiersbe, "Be Joyful; It beats being happy", p.116

How does this practically work out?

1. Read more, watch less - No short cuts. We find time to binge watch a favorite show, but the Bible has been given to us as a book, not a movie. When we read and meditate on Scripture, a strange thing begins to happen: we **think!** We imagine. We have questions. We begin to see the world differently.

2. Un-clutter our minds - Our minds need to be **renewed**, which means there are ways of thinking that need to change. Opinions and ideologies are powerful and hard to wipe out. But we all have unbiblical ways that we think, since we have been influenced by the demonic wisdom of this world. There are areas of our thinking that need to be recognized, confessed, and repented of. This is why we need others to speak the truth, since I can so easily convince myself that my opinions are right.

3. Seek Wisdom like a hidden treasure - **Proverbs 2:1-6** says to seek wisdom like silver and search for it like hidden treasure. Here is the great part of gaining wisdom: *God promises that it is available for all of us!* Tomorrow my friend Mike Munden is going to stay at our house and going to Shepherds Conference with us. Mike came to us from a hard background and far from intellectual pursuits. I remember as God captured his mind and heart that his appetite grew for God's Word, went on to get a seminary degree, and now is a Sr. Pastor in Indiana. Amazing! Wisdom and new thinking is possible, but it must be sought after.

Standing Firm Practices All We Have Learned (9)

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

We live out what we think

Maturity does not happen overnight. The word that Paul uses for **practice** has the meaning of regular, consistent, or continual action, an act that is repetitive daily. Maturity and stability is built up like a child or plant growing. There is consistent feeding, care, and help and over time, results come, even if you can't see it day in and day out. The problem most people have is not that they aren't making decisions or living, but they do not know why, or are living for themselves or some lesser God. **Living for God's glory is hard.** It demands that we invest time in thinking through why we do anything, having a reason for what we are doing, and adjusting or evaluating all the time.

We live out what we learn

We also need to learn from others. Paul gave himself as an example to follow, as he had done before. Paul had modeled life for the Ephesian church by living for multiple years with them, serving with humility, tears, face to face, and house to house (Acts. 20:19-20). He showed the Philippian church what it looked like to sing while persecuted, rejoicing while imprisoned, to keep going in ministry even though there is rejection, to show patience with all people, to speak the truth in love, to seek Christ, to long for the return of Christ, and to do all of this in a **broken, imperfect, sinful world.**

Who are you learning from as you grow in maturity? Are you surrounding yourselves with only people who are like you? If so, we can only grow in ignorance (2 Cor. 10:12). We must surround ourselves with those who are settled, who have gone before us, who have learned the lessons we are still going through.

Why living out what we think and learn is so vital

- **We will be at peace** - The promise of the peace of God and the God of peace being with us is the double promise that we can be settled in this life. God has not called us to chaos even though He has not promised being comfortable. He has promised future blessings that are sure so we can handle the loss of things in this world. He has made peace through the cross so that we can stand firm now. If you are struggling with that kind of darkness that invades your mind and heart, whether depression, anxiety, fear, or insecurity, the answer is not thinking less but thinking right. God has promised to guard our mind and heart, to give peace, as we infuse our minds with the truth. The darkness does not always lift easily or immediately, but we hope that it can and will.
- **We will be effective** - As the world continues to plunge into darkness, we remain settled. As the extremes around us become normative and right is called wrong and pure impure, we offer a Savior that has changed our mind and heart, that allows us to see clearly what is going on and what will go on. Never has living out a resolute, thinking, consistent, and joyful life in Christ been more needed, and never will that strategy be more effective.

So we engage our minds in Christ, because He has given us His.