

Philippians: The Book of Joy (Phil. 4:8-9)

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 30 March 2025

Preacher: Scott Liddell

[0 : 01] If you are new with us today, we are on the tail end of a sermon series, walking to the book of Philippians. But I'm going to begin our time, though, instead of in Philippians 4, if you want to turn there, we're going to be looking at verse 8 and 9 here shortly.

But I'm going to begin in the book of Matthew. You may recall in Matthew 22, there was a man who was an expert of the law of Moses, and he came and they asked Jesus a question.

He said to him in Matthew 22, he says to Jesus, Teacher, what is the greatest commandment of the law? And he said to him, You shall love the Lord your God with all of your heart, with all of your soul, and with all of your mind.

And this is what Jesus' response was to this teacher of the law. And what does it look like to love the Lord with one's mind?

And that is in part what we're going to be looking at today, is what does it look like to love the Lord with one's mind? The human mind is this incredible aspect that we have been given.

[1 : 15] It has the capacity to solve great problems and to make great discoveries. And that's what in part makes the tragedy of the original sin of Adam and Eve so difficult.

We read now since the fall of Adam and Eve and all of humanity apart from Christ, we know that the mind, there's nine ways that I quickly found how God's Word this week describes the mind of a fallen man.

It says, He is depraved. The mind is focused on the flesh. The mind is hostile toward the Lord. The mind is foolish. The mind is hardened to spiritual truth.

The mind is blinded by Satan. The mind is futile. The mind is ignorant. And lastly, the mind is defiled. This beautiful mind that the Lord has given all of humanity has been corrupted by the fall deeply.

And even when we come to know the Lord, we're made new. The residual effects, though, of this fallen mind, then the flesh still remains.

[2 : 29] Jonathan Edwards said that seeking after God is the main business of His creation. So we ought to seek after the Lord. That's the main business that a Christian has.

And we are to also do that with our minds. And we know now that we are transformed by the renewing of our mind. That that's to be a continual activity. To pursue the Lord takes diligent work.

To love the Lord with one's mind. It's interesting how we think of the word love and loving the Lord with our minds. Because it's unusual for us to think about love in terms of an intellectual activity.

We often in our culture hear of love referred to as a very passive activity. For example, we don't say, I jumped into love. We say, I fell into love.

One takes energy to jump into love. And the other is very passive. Suge? Okay.

[3 : 42] That was a brief intermission. We speak of love in passive ways.

But God's word tells us it's an active thing. To love the Lord with one's mind is active. We don't, we don't, it's not a passive thing. Real love is not an involuntary action.

Let me illustrate. 25 years ago when I first met my wife, I did not fall in love. There were things about Wendy that I loved deeply.

Firstly, she loved the Lord. And I found that very attractive. Her service to the Lord in the local church was also beautiful to me.

She liked to cook. And I liked to eat. That, I find that attractive. She was kind and thoughtful to others in her speech. She noticed children.

[4 : 43] She sought ways to honor her parents. She liked to cook. She prayed faithfully. She spent time with the Lord and shared what she was learning often in her time with the Lord.

She had ambition and she's a driven person. She loves her siblings and found ways to remember them and recognize them. She is hospitable, hosting people in an apartment where she lived. And lastly, if I failed to mention it, she likes to cook. These are things I observed about her and I sought to love her.

These things were a mental activity I noted and I loved that. Love is not a passive thing. Paul's argument today will be this, that good thinking results in good doing.

That, if you want the main point of the message, that's it. Good thinking leads to good doing. That leads us to our passage today that our children sang to us this morning.

[5 : 49] Philippians chapter 4. Let us read verses 8 and 9 together. 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.

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

Good thinking leads to good doing. I feel compelled because of our Christian environment today, though, to give us what Paul is not talking about.

And this is important because verse 8 is used by a number of people that I would say is false teaching. It leads people astray from the Lord, not to the Lord.

And let me just give a quick overview in history. Norman Vincent Peale was born in 1898 and he died in 1993. Peale wrote a book entitled *The Power of Positive Thinking* that was published in 1952.

[7 : 03] Peale had a protege after him whose name was Robert Shuler, born in 1926, passing away in 2015. He was a televangelist known for his radio program, *The Hour of Power*, and he had also built the Crystal Cathedral there in California.

Robert Shuler popularized the notion of positive thinking. Even though both men were welcomed into evangelical circles, they were not orthodox. That is, conforming to the universal teachings that is historically true throughout Scripture or throughout history and time.

The heresy of positive thinking further spread into what is called positive confession, also called the health and wealth gospel now today, of whom there are many proponents.

Many Christian sales companies, for example, train their salesmen and women utilizing a form of the error of this sales motivation called positive mental attitude. Having faith in yourself and visualizing yourself as successful and wealthy so that the reality of that becomes true for you.

All these errors are based on heresy of the science of the mind taught, going back even further, Ernest Holmes, born in the mid-1800s and passing away in the mid-1900s.

[8 : 25] He founded the Church of Religious Science, essentially teaching that your mind can create your reality through positive thinking, and you can do anything or achieve anything you want.

He cited many other health and wealth proponents, but I want to say this. Ernest Holmes, who I would say goes all the way back to, all these other ones that I just mentioned go back to Ernest Holmes.

Ernest Holmes and the others often would use Philippians 4, verse 8 as their proof text for this way of thinking. But what is Paul talking about?

He's talking about one's need to simply subject oneself to the lordship of Christ and thinking about certain lovely, beautiful, pure things.

Paul is not teaching about the power of positive thinking. So then what is Paul talking about? Paul is teaching that Christians' thought life should be focused on the great truths of Scripture.

[9 : 32] The word finally there in verse 8, as Pastor Jay has said often, the word finally doesn't mean finally. But this finally, it indicates that Paul has arrived at the climax of his teaching on spiritual stability.

Paul is arguing all through chapter 4, I want you to be a spiritually stable person. Spiritual stability is rooted in your thought life and how you think. Think about these things is what Paul is saying at the end of verse 8.

These lovely, beautiful things, think about them. The word think is a command there in verse 8. It's not a suggestion. Proper thinking is not optional for the Christian life.

The word think means more than just to entertain thoughts or to evaluate or to consider or to calculate it. It means these things, to evaluate, consider, calculate.

It takes intentional thought to think about these things. The verb think calls for the habitual discipline of the mind to set all your thoughts on these spiritual virtues.

[10 : 39] The Bible leaves no doubt that people's lives are the product of their thoughts. Let me just think about the reverse of this, and I think we all can relate.

I hear, I sense even in my own life, and I hear in others, sometimes we watch news, and there's anxiety that is produced.

Because we begin to think about things. And so then anxiety is produced. I know a brother here in the church who ceased listening to talk radio because he became agitated in his spirit.

He began to hate people who he's been called to love. He began to despise people. He's been called to pray for. And so he began to get all agitated in his spirit because he listened to talk radio. He was filling his mind with something, and it was having the converse effect of what the Lord wanted. And all you need to do is read reports on social media of people feeling of inadequacy, jealousy, depression, isolation.

[11 : 52] All of these things come because these forms of social media begin to inform what we ought to be setting our minds on. And they're not leading to things that are lovely and pure and true often.

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, we are to think about these things.

So what I'm going to do for the rest of the message is to walk through each of these aspects. What is, what are these things that we are to think about? The first one that we come to is what is true.

What is true is that which is ultimately real. Ultimately, that is reality, that which is true. And what is the ultimate truth? God himself.

He is the only and final chest for truth because he is the personification of that which is true. Since God is unchanging, moral standards revealed in his word, they stem from his holy nature, which is also unchanging.

[13 : 09] So those moral standards apply to every culture. God cannot lie who has made known the truth through his word. As fallen creatures, we are prone to Satan's lies and deceptions.

One person who, an account of a person who is sad to me in all of scripture is the man whose name is Demas. We don't know much about him, but Paul was ministering and he, Paul mentions him as, and he's dismayed a bit because he says, Demas has abandoned me and the reason is given because he is in love with this present world.

That there is some allure of the world that he ended up departing from Paul and turning his back on the work of the gospel. How did Demas replace his love for Christ with a love for this present world and abandon the work of the gospel?

How did that happen? At some level, Demas believed a lie. That's how it happened. We live in an era where emotions supplant truth.

We live in an era where pragmatism of a culture determines what is true. If it works, it must be true. That's the pragmatist. But how do we stabilize ourselves spiritually and guard against this?

[14 : 35] The answer lies with Jesus in his high priestly prayer. Jesus says, Father, your word is truth. Thinking about whatever is true means analyzing and meditating on God's word.

Considering the truths of God's word. If we're going to think about what is true, we must be a people of his word. Because good thinking leads to good doing.

The second attribute that is mentioned there in Philippians 4.8 is that which is honorable. It means that which is noble or worthy of respect.

The word is used to describe a lifestyle elsewhere in the New Testament. In 1 Timothy 3.8 it mentions deacons. They are to be honorable people. And also it mentions in Titus 2.2 of older men are to be, older saints are to be, older men are in 2.2 are to be noble people.

Honorable. Worthy of respect. I appreciate older saints who have walked with the Lord for many years. They have seen the Lord prove himself again and again.

[15 : 48] It's as if they are unflappable. They know the Lord. They know his truth. And they are not anxious about the circumstances that would rock a much younger person.

Who has not perhaps encountered something like this and haven't seen the Lord proven himself trustworthy in their own lives personally. They know the truths of scripture but they haven't applied it yet for themselves.

And there's a distinction between that person, the younger person, and an older saint who says, Oh, you can trust the Lord in this. These things are not new.

And there's just a beauty to those older saints who take the Lord at his word and have done so for years and live a very honorable life. Good thinking leads to good doing.

The third attribute is just. Think about that which is just. The word can be translated right or righteous. Just, justice is morally right.

[16:52] What's hard is in many of our homes we pay for the immoral to be brought into our homes.

We pay for subscriptions. Cable TV, Dish, Netflix, Prime, Hulu, you name it. Oftentimes many of us are subscribed to these things and we pay for that which is immoral to be brought into our homes.

Sometimes we don't even have to pay for that. These are free services. Things like social media.

But are those things just, righteous, morally right that we are inviting into our homes?

The aim is to be holy for he is holy. That is our aim. Because good thinking leads to good doing.

We're also to consider that which is pure.

Let us consider Philippians, not Philippians 4, Ephesians 5, 3 through 5. The word pure refers to a ceremonial or moral purity.

[17:59] Ephesians 5, 3 through 5 reads this. But sexual immorality and all impurity and covetousness must not be even named among you as is proper among saints.

Let there be no filthiness, nor foolish talk, nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral and pure or who is covetous, that is an idolater, has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.

As you think back over this last week, let's consider together. What was it that your eyes looked upon?

Was it pure? Did you linger and listen in on things that were impure? Did you initiate or participate in any foolish talk or crude joking?

The innuendos? Are you participating currently in any illicit relationship you have no business being in? Did your mind gravitate?

[19:05] Did you set your mind on or entertain things that are impure? Because we're to think about those things that are pure. Because good thinking leads to good doing.

We're also to consider that which is lovely. To think about that which is lovely. This word is the only time it is used in the New Testament.

It means what is pleasing, agreeable, attractive. In the context, it would be to think about that which is pure and generous, patient, gracious, on the things that the Bible calls pleasing or attractive and amiable toward the Lord.

I was thinking about this, thinking about that which is lovely. And I was thinking about David in Psalm chapter 8, beginning in verse 3 through the end of the chapter.

I think about David because his first line in verse 3 of Psalm 8 verse 3 reads this. When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars which you have set in place.

[20:16] Let me just pause. Can you see David? He's a shepherd. He knows what it is to be a shepherd. He's laid on the hillsides time and again.

It's evening time. And the sun has set and he is gazing, laying on his back. The sheep are cared for. They're in their place.

He's guarding them. And he's just looking at the heavens and the stars. And of course, there's no light pollution. So he sees the Milky Way in plain sight.

He sees all the stars. They're brilliant. And he is struck as he gazes upon the moon. And have you ever been on a night where there's a full moon?

It's like if there's a flashlight out. You can see very plainly. And he's thinking about all these celestial stars and the moons, things that he can't quite fathom. And then he thinks how beautiful and amazing all of these things are.

[21:20] He considers this. And think about what David is doing. And he's thinking about that which is lovely. Then he says this. So then what is man that you are mindful of him and the son of man that you would care for him?

Who is humankind, Lord, that you would even think of us when you have all of this beauty, all these things answered to you?

You know them each by name. Who is man that you're even mindful of me? Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings, crowned him with glory and honor. David can't get past this. You have given him dominion over the works of your hands. You have put all things under his feet, all the sheep and the ox and the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas. And then this thinking about that which is lovely, he's praising the Lord and it leads him to worship. Because then he concludes the psalm by saying, Oh Lord, oh Lord, how majestic is your name in all of the earth.

[22 : 35] If thinking about that which is pure and lovely does not end in worship, you have not considered it enough. Paul, David is struck by the beauty and his thinking about just who mankind is in relation to all other creation and it leads him to worship because it's lovely.

Good thinking leads to good doing. We are to think about that which is commendable. Commendable or good reputation or good repute.

It describes that which is highly regarded and well thought of. Our thoughts are elevated by scripture to fix on the loftiest of themes. Themes. Themes like the goodness of God.

Themes like his grace. His unmatched and undeserved favor. Even his wrath towards sin is good. Jesus' payment for sin, assuming God's wrath towards sin upon himself, is good.

That the guilty are pardoned. Think about that. God's ongoing sanctifying work using ordinary daily circumstances to bring about spiritual maturity in your life and mine.

[24 : 03] What were they this week? Think about them. How did they play into the grand narrative of scripture, bringing about spiritual maturity seen through your ordinary circumstances, even those that were unpleasant this last week?

Think about it. Then the sentence structure changes in the bottom of verse 4. It begins with two if statements.

If there is anything, any excellence. If there is anything worthy of praise. If. If. Basically, he's saying these are not all inclusive virtues that we are to think about.

But if there is anything worthy of praise. If there is anything that is excellent. You are to also think about, consider these things. Fill your mind with these things.

When we place our faith in Christ, we are to stop any behavior that is out of line with God's moral virtues as related and revealed in scripture.

[25 : 11] God's aim is for our good in these virtues. Good thinking leads to good doing. Good thinking leads to good doing.

So he says, consider these things. And as I, Paul, have considered these things myself, I have taught them. And so anything you've learned, anything that you've received and heard and seen in me, then practice these things.

Because those of us, those of you who think in these terms will practice these things. Because good thinking leads to good doing. So in terms of application for us today, I have written a few things out.

How do we apply these things? We must block out and clean out all sources of sinful thoughts or sinful thinking.

In Kent Hughes' book, *The Disciplines of a Godly Man*, where we as men are reading through this book. And we get together for men's breakfast. And we review a chapter. And we've been enjoying that.

[26 : 44] In this book, Kent Hughes says this. And page, it doesn't matter what page it's on. I'll spare you. But he says this.

I am aware of the wise warnings against using words like all, every, always, and what I say. Absolutizing one's pronouncements are dangerous.

But I'm going to do it anyway, the author writes. And so then he says, here it is. It is impossible for any Christian who spends the bulk of his evenings every month after month, week after week, day in and day out, watching major television networks or contemporary videos, reading magazines, podcasts, radio, apps, social media, and games and devices.

It is impossible. Let me go to his first part. It is impossible for any Christian who spends the bulk of his evenings to have a Christian mind. Then he includes all those things. And then he says this.

This is always true of all Christians in every situation. Kent Hughes wrote this years ago. And I still believe it to be true today.

[28 : 01] If that is how we spend the bulk of our time, the bulk of our evenings, it will be very hard for you and I to have the Christian mind. Not just hard. Impossible.

Number two. Expose your mind to Christian teaching and examples of Christian throughout history. I have a confession to make. I didn't come to faith in Christ until I was 19. And when I was young in my faith, I did not really have time to read biographies.

I didn't think I had time to do that. I skipped over many Christian readings that I could have spent my time doing. And hearing of men and women of the faith who have lived throughout history. Since growing in my understanding of the Lord, I have thoroughly enjoyed biographies. And now I listen to them in audio book form. Currently, and I commend to you, if you want to think about that which is true and lovely and good and pure and honorable, consider biographies.

[29 : 12] John Piper wrote a series, and I'm commending them to you, called The Swans Are Not Silent. In each book, he covers about three people throughout history that he covers in each book.

He wrote one in that series, The Swans Are Not Silent, called or entitled Contending for Our All. And he highlights different people throughout history who have defended the truth of treasuring Christ.

And he starts with this man whose name is Athanasius. And Athanasius, many of you should name your sons that. It's a beautiful name.

Because he's an amazing figure in history. He is the one person who it is attributed to who went to the Nicene Council back in 325 A.D.

He was a pastor in Alexandria, Egypt. And Constantine, at the time, the Roman emperor, funded the travel expenses for pastors throughout the Mediterranean Sea, the known world of the Roman Empire, to go to Nicaea, which is in modern-day Turkey, to settle a dispute whether over, and the dispute in some ways was over.

[30 : 30] There were many things that the Council of Nicaea settled, but one of the big ones was a word choice between homoousios and homoousius. Is Jesus the same substance as the father, homoousios?

That was Athanasius. And Arius, where we get Arianism, the other gentleman who was arguing was saying, No, no, no, no, no, he's of similar substance as the father.

That's homoousius. And so they wanted to know when they wrote their confession and their creed at the Council of Nicaea, is Jesus the same essence of the father or similar essence of the father? And they argued over this word. And Athanasius, this pastor contending for truth, was saying, No, Jesus is God.

He is of the same essence of the father, as the father. And thank the Lord that Athanasius and a number of other pastors won that argument at the Council of Nicaea, but he contended for truth.

[31 : 39] You say, Scott, that's a great history lesson. Thanks. How does that pertain to us? You're contending for truth in your home.

You're contending for truth at work. You're contending for truth in your families. You're contending for truth in the community somewhere all the time.

And I took great courage learning of this man. I knew of the man before I read the, but I grew in my appreciation of Athanasius by just listening to the story and filling my mind.

That which is true and honorable, pure, good, lovely. I commend to you biographies. The works that have stood the test of time.

Listen to also Christ-centric worship music. Christ-centered worship music. I have Easter on the mind, the Resurrection Sunday.

[32 : 40] And so I've been reading many things and listening to many things. And I have a Spotify account of just Easter songs that pertain to the resurrection and the death and resurrection of Christ.

And so I was listening to this. And I was listening, and I came across the song I'd never heard before. And I thought, wait a minute. And so I began to, I paused, and I began to listen to the words, and I replayed the song.

And I was, it led to worship. Let me just read the lyrics of the song that I heard. I won't, I'll spare you from singing it.

But think about the Passion Week, the week before the resurrection, the week of his crucifixion and resurrection. That week, all the events, the Garden of Gethsemane, the Upper Room, think about the riding a colt and laying down the palm leaves, all of that palm branch leaves.

Have that week in your mind as I listen to these lyrics, as I say these lyrics. With one breath, Hosanna, we cry. With the next one, we say, crucify.

[33 : 55] With one voice, we praise your name. With the same voice, we condemn you to shame. With palm leaves, we welcome your reign.

With twisted thorns, we crown you with pain. You wash our feet to show us your love. We washed our hands of your innocent blood. We claim you when you come in power, but we leave you in your terrible hour.

We hail you for victory won, but we mock you when you say, it is done. And isn't that me?

Isn't that you? With one voice, one day in the week, we will praise his name, and then in another part of the week, we will do something to his shame.

And I saw myself, and I just led me to confess, Lord, you are good. Forgive me. Forgive me. Good books.

[35 : 07] Good worship music. To help your mind think about that which is pure, lovely, good, true, honorable. And last, and most important, spend time knowing God and enjoying his presence through the reading of his word.

The Bible is God's self-revelation to mankind. It is pure. It is without error. It is the very breath of God.

It is inspired by him. This week, I read Psalm 19, Psalm 119, which is a psalm that is all about God's word and its benefits.

I just quickly read the chapter and found 20 benefits of reading God's word. Let me read them. In verse 2, it talks about God's word leading to joy.

In verse 9, it talks about that God's word can keep us from sinning. In verse 24, it offers free counsel. In verse 36, it guards against the trap of self-seeking.

[36 : 17] In verse 43, it offers hope. In verse 45, the word of the Lord grants us freedom. In verse 50, the word brings comfort in affliction.

In verse 54, it gives us something to sing about. It's the anchor of truth in the midst of lies. It allows us to be an example to others.

It offers hope while we wait. It sustains us during hard seasons. It's life-giving. It offers wisdom and understanding. It illumines the path that we should take.

It keeps us from falling into enemy traps. It acts as a shield around us. It helps us to know the character of God. It's how we experience God.

It gives us peace. Those are just 20 of the benefits of God's word. And I'm sure all of us could benefit this week in those 20 ways listed and many more that he has to offer.

[37 : 20] I will conclude with this story. In 1977, the news media picked up a story out of Chicago, Illinois.

There was a woman who was living that was commonly referred to by many as Garbage Mary. Garbage Mary lived alone in a \$150 apartment.

Now, this is 1977. She would rummage through garbage to find food and find little treasures that she would take home and hoard. She would rumm cigarettes off of any passerby.

And having suffered two unhappy marriages, she fell into a depression. Hopelessness set in. The isolation fed into the deterioration of her mind. And she was arrested for vagrancy.

Keep in mind, 1977. She was taken to the Banyan House Psychiatric Institute, a mental hospital. And the police went to her apartment and they found her true identity and much more.

[38 : 26] Garbage Mary's real name was Kathleen Nelson. She was the daughter of Sig Nelson. A notable lawyer and a bank director who had died three years prior.

Garbage Mary had inherited her father's estate. And she was worth over a million dollars. 1977. It's a sad and pathetic story.

But it pictures the lives of many of us today. Who could be immersing our thought life in what is true and honorable, just and pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, and that which is worthy of praise.

But instead, we surround ourselves with moral filth, wallowing in raunchy reads, immoral shows, wading through pages and pages of social medias and websites, polluting our minds with all sordid kinds of stories of the condemned world.

Rather than focusing our thought life on the things of God in Christ. May this not be so of us, fourth. Why is this so important?

[39 : 31] Because Paul is making the argument that good thinking leads to good living. May we do so. We pray. Father. Father. Father.

Forgive us for not taking your word seriously at times. For not thinking about things that are honorable and true and just and pure, lovely, commendable.

Lord, forgive us for not thinking about these things and setting our minds on these things. We recognize that thinking is not a passive activity. It is active.

So, Lord, we renew ourselves to you again. We commend ourselves to you to say, forgive us, Lord. And may we repent and go forward, change in how we think. We love you. We thank you, Lord, for your goodness and your grace.

[40 : 47] And it's in your beautiful name we pray. Amen.