

## Think This Way

- Philippians 4:8-9
- We are used to being told, increasingly so in our culture, how we should think. If we want to be inclusive. Or environmentally responsible. Or politically correct. And people in more repressive countries would laugh at the low level of ‘thought-police’ activities we face here. But we are people of the Book. Our highest goal, the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus, is to live lives that are worthy of the Gospel, and to honor and glorify God with everything we do, and say, and THINK! So it is not surprising that we find the Bible filled with instruction as to how we are to think. And what we are to think about. What does it mean to think Christianly? Or to have a Christian mind? Some would say that it means that we only think about Christian things. But that is not true. A Christian mind is a mind that has learned to think about everything from a Christian perspective. That means that we don’t have to just listen to so-called Christian music, but we think about all music, and judge all music, from a Christian perspective. We bring our minds to bear upon all that we see and hear and read in a way that is trained and informed by God’s Word. So that brings us to today’s text. But let’s remember that context, at least in biblical interpretation, is king. This passage today, verses 8 and 9, are set in the context of verses 4-9. If you were here last week or you heard the sermon online, you know that we talked about how important and how powerful verses 4-7 are, in instructing us as followers of Jesus how we are to have our hearts ruled and protected by His peace. What is the reward of rejoicing in the Lord at all times, and being reasonable and gentle, choosing not to be anxious about anything but to pray about everything? It is the peace of God that guards our hearts and minds. And today we see that the reward of thinking about the things that are excellent and worthy of praise, and practicing such things ourselves, is the God of peace. The peace of God: His peace for those who trust Him enough not to worry. The God of peace: His palpable presence for those who love Him enough to put on the mind of Christ. Some say, I had a great feeling of peace in church on Sunday but by Wednesday everything is turned upside down and my life is a mess! Ok, but what did you listen to or read or watch on Monday? And Tuesday? What has fed you, what material have you fed your mind with since Sunday? If the answer is, total nonsense and worldly material, then there’s the problem.
- The mind is the fertile soil that enriches our lives as we plant in it the truth of God’s Word. It is how we truly THINK that determines how we feel and what we do. So the question we must come back to again and again is, “Is the soil of my mind continually fed by the truth of God’s Word?” It must be! Because the mind is also the bloody battlefield where men and women are too often taken captive by the lies of the world, so seductively packaged for us in movies and TV shows and in music and on social media and in magazines and books. In *Paradise Lost*, John Milton writes, “A mind is its own place, and in itself/Can make a heav’n of hell, a hell of heav’n...” It’s why Jesus says the greatest command is to “love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.” (Mark 12:30) If we are loving God with our minds, then we will have hearts that are stirred up with genuine affection for God. But we cannot go at it the other way, by doing whatever we want to with our minds, and then expect our emotions to be turned on and fired up with a love for God. John Piper said “The theological mind exists to throw logs into the furnace of our affections for God.” I was driving to church a couple of Sundays ago, and flipped on the radio, trying to find some worship music. But what I heard instantly was a preacher screaming in a voice that was an affectation; I know this because every now and then he would come off the raspy scream and speak in his normal voice. But what shocked me more was to hear him say, “Ya’ll don’t need to use your mind to worship God. Let the Holy Ghost think! Let the Holy Ghost reason!” I’m screaming at the radio at this point, trying not to run off the road. Listen, saints. Real change happens when we change how we think. And when we change what we think about. And when we change how we think about what we think about.
- So, here’s a simple way of looking at the brackets on either side of verse 8. First, verse 7, the peace of God guards our hearts and minds when we learn to practice what? Rejoice in the Lord always. Be

reasonable and gentle with all. Do not worry about anything. Pray about everything, with the posture of gratefulness. Then the peace of God is the fruit. Then, verse 9, the God of peace will be seen and felt in our lives more and more as we do what? Learn to use our minds to think the right way about the right things. Practice loving the Lord with all of your mind until it becomes who you are. Because at the end of the day, we are what we think. OK, that's the introduction. Now let's look at verse 8 together.

- **Think about these things**

- Paul gives us six adjectives to describe what should characterize the things we feed our minds on. It doesn't mean we only read or consume Christian material. I read the local newspaper every day and wade through some of the worldly thinking and sensationalism and bad journalism and just fake news that I find there. But I know how to eat the meat and throw away the bone. We are to be in the world but not of the world. Learning how to do that is helped by applying the questions we see in the text today to everything we consume with our mind:

- **Is it true?**

- This is an important question, isn't it? We are those who seek the truth. We are followers of the one who said, "I am the truth." Jesus also said that if we abide in His Word then we are truly His disciples and we will know the truth and the truth will make us free. This means, saints, that there is true truth. The latest statistic I have heard on whether you believe in objective, absolute truth is this: more than 50% of those who claim to be born again believe that all truth is relative. In other words they would say, "Well, I believe that Jesus is the Son of God. That's my truth. But I don't believe that it has to be everyone's truth." No, upon that truth, that Jesus is the Son of God, sent from heaven to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins, upon THAT truth hangs all the hope for mankind. And that truth is absolutely true for all people of all cultures for all time. Is it true? This means we are called to reject false doctrine, whether we find it on a billboard, or on a TV show, or in a Facebook post, or in a sermon. And as I remind you often, the only way you will be able to recognize false doctrine is to know true doctrine, and the only way to know true doctrine is through study and meditation and reading and hearing the Word of God. Jesus prayed this for us, "Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth."

- **Is it honorable?**

- Paul used this word to describe the character of older men in Titus 2:2, that they are to be dignified. It signifies that which has or inspires moral excellence. Think on things that are honorable. The opposite is to think about things that drag our hearts and our character down into the cesspool or the gutter.

- **Is it just?**

- Paul always used this word to refer to both the character of God, which is just, and the actions and the thoughts of people who know God: that what we do and how we live is just and right. The actions of the team that went to Mexico, at their own expense, and built a house for someone who did not have the means to do so for herself, was just and right in the eyes of God.

- **Is it pure?**

- We often think here of sexual purity, and we should. The example of a young man who was pure in the face of temptation was Joseph, the slave to Potiphar who was solicited by Potiphar's wife. His answer to her was, "How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" That's the question we must train our minds to think before we slip into any area that we know is not pure: how can I do this great wickedness and sin against God? Remember that our sins cannot forever be hidden; they will find us out. Those accused in the #MeToo flood that is happening right now know that very well. But this question, "Is it pure?" extends beyond sexual sin to all impurity. We are to stay away from all that is stained with evil.

- **Is it lovely?**
- We are to think about things that are attractive morally, like good character, or attractive aesthetically, like a good song or work of art. “All that is beautiful in creation and in human lives,” Gordon Fee says. There are Christians who are obsessed with seeing the latest horror movie, the more evil and demonic the better, and who enjoy the darkness of movies or TV shows that explore the most evil and heinous acts of cruelty that men can inflict on one another. Remember, nothing happens in a vacuum, and everything we see or hear or read shapes us. Let’s learn to discern and ask the question: does this book, movie, TV show, or song have a redeeming value in that good triumphs over evil and evil is not in any way glorified? If the answer is not a resounding YES, and we watch it anyway, we have become deceived in our thinking.
- **Is it commendable?**
- Is this something that is spoken highly of by people of good character? And is it something that I believe is worth recommending to others because it will help them press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus? And really, each of these six characteristics point us to Christ, who embodies them perfectly: HE is perfect truth, perfect honor, perfect justice, perfect purity, perfect loveliness, perfectly commendable.
- Paul sums it up with this: “if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.” Let your mind continue to dwell on these things. Now you can also flip the list and say this with confidence: “Whatever is untrue, whatever is dishonorable, whatever is unjust, whatever is impure, whatever is unlovely, whatever is not commendable, if there is anything not morally excellent, if there is anything unworthy of praise, DO NOT think about these things!” Kent Hughes says that we as Christians must develop the “discipline of refusal.” Some have ironclad wills when it comes to what they put into their mouths and they simply refuse to eat anything that is not organic, or healthy, or anything that is filled with sugar or whatever. I applaud you and wish I had more of that discipline myself. But remember that Jesus said it is not what goes into our mouths that defile us but what comes out of our hearts. And our hearts are filled with what we think about and what we consume with our minds. What are the things in your life over which you need to exercise the discipline of refusal? PAUSE

Along with that, we must practice the discipline that Paul talks about at the end of verse 8:

- **Think about these things**
- The word there, “logizomai” is the word from which we get “logarithm.” Paul is commanding us to approach the good things in Scripture with the same discipline and thoughtfulness with which you would approach a difficult mathematical problem. Thinking about the Scriptures like a cow chews it cud, swallowing it, regurgitating it to chew on it some more, is the way we grow in our knowledge and practice of the word.
- **Practice these things: vs. 9**
- We heard a wonderful testimony by Dianne last week, who confessed that she came from a long line of worriers. And that she was convicted one day about how much she worried and how that was not pleasing to the Lord. So she started praying each time she started to worry. And it took a long time until she had re-trained her brain to substitute prayer for worry, and to trust the Lord. Practice these things. Re-train your brain to think about these things, not to let your mind ‘veg’ out on the things of this world. The reward? The God of peace will be with you.