

Text: Philippians 4:8

Title: Think Good

Truth: The Spirit of God helps us to fashion our thinking so that it is filled with good things.

Date/Location: June 9, 2024 at FBC

Introduction

Last week we worked on “thinking no evil,” extending the Japanese proverb which says, “See no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil.” Of course, we derive our authority from God’s word, not human proverbs, so we searched out what Zechariah 8:17 and 1 Corinthians 13:5 had to say about this matter. The simple fact is that Christians must guard their thinking so that they do not fall into evil assumptions and thoughts, and much less fall into *patterns* of such thoughts.

What we took away last week by way of prohibition we must replace with something better. It is one thing to say “Do not do X,” but it is another thing to explain what the solution to X is and how to do something much more God-pleasing than X.

Given the title “think good” you might think I do not know my grammar very good (!). But I am not talking about thinking “well” as in logically, with careful method, thoroughly, sober-mindedly. That is critically important to be sure, and I have had a thought or two about how to help us do that. For example, if I say that you are not saved by doing good works, someone might illegitimately jump to the conclusion that I believe good works are not at all important in the Christian life. But there was no bridge from what I said to that conclusion! Or if there was, the only “bridge” was the phantom bridge you had in your own mind because of your own lack of understanding or wrong understanding that you wish to justify. For example, if you embrace easy believism, or if you hold to works-salvation, these errors can cause you to jump to unwarranted conclusions when you hear part of the truth of God’s word.

So, it is not the quality or manner of thinking that concerns me in this message. Rather, I am talking about the *content* of things you

think—the subject matter of your thoughts which are *good things*. You need to think such things for your own sake, your own purity and sanity, but also you need to think about others good things, something like I alluded to last week about having a godly concern for souls, grief over their sin, a hope for their salvation, and a resolve not to follow their evil ways and thoughts in your own life.

I. Philippians 4:8

⁸ Finally, brethren, whatever things are true,
 whatever things *are* noble,
 whatever things *are* just,
 whatever things *are* pure,
 whatever things *are* lovely,
 whatever things *are* of good report,
 if *there is* any virtue
 and if *there is* anything praiseworthy—
 meditate on these things.

No question that this is a very well-known portion of God’s word. You can use it to help you evaluate what you are thinking at any particular time—is it true, noble, pure, lovely, virtuous, etc. And you can also use it to push yourself to think about those sorts of things. You have a meaningful role in *deciding* what you will think about. You cannot control every external stimulus that comes to you, but you can decide how you are going to respond to it.

Example: a man called into a radio show and explained how his young adult son died. He and his wife made a conscious decision that even though it was devastating and difficult and unpleasant, they were not going to allow it to define who they are. They would not allow it to dominate their lives or drive them to despair. They were insistent on being constructive in their approach. When you are in the Lord, you can do this all the much more easily.

(Remainder of this section lightly edit from message on Philippians 4:8-9 of May 8, 2022). The battle between the flesh and the Spirit rages on in the life of every believer, whether you recognize it or not. Where it rages is in the mind—in the inner person, in the soul. It has to do with sinful thoughts, vulgar words, lustful fantasies,

inordinate¹ desires, and the like. And sometimes, those thoughts come out in our speech or behavior! As a corrective, the apostle instructs us to spend our mental time on the following kinds of things:²

- A. **True.** Not false. Valid, reliable, honest. True things correspond to how things are, not necessarily how someone presents them to be. More importantly, truth corresponds to how God sees things, not how man sees them. What the Bible presents as true is true, and it guides you how to be discerning about other things.

What the Bible presents as false is also false—so when it records the wrong words of Job’s friends, or of Satan, it accurately portrays those words, and by them conveys information that is *not* true. “You will not surely die!” (Gen. 3:4) is a false statement, accurately conveyed to us in Scripture, in such a way that the truth is emphasized. That is, if Adam and Eve eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they *will* die (Gen. 2:17).

Truth characterizes God. It should characterize us too.

- B. **Noble.** Honorable, dignified, worthy of respect, above reproach.

God is noble. We should be too.

- C. **Just.** Conforming to God’s standard of right. Today we have social justice and environmental justice and economic justice. What about *divine justice*—does it get at least a place at the table? In fact, it rules the entire table.

God is just. We should be too.

- D. **Pure.** Moral purity, chastity. See 1 Timothy 5:22, Titus 2:5, James 3:17, 1 John 3:3.

God has no impurity in Him. We should be similar in our thinking and life.

You have so many mental “cycles” in a minute or hour or day, and you can choose how to spend them. This idea comes from the design of digital computers, which operate in accordance with a

¹ Excessive; disproportionate compared to a standard; unrestrained; disorderly.

² Some of the definitions below are taken from Homer Kent, *Philippians*, p. 152.

clock signal. That clock times their work and the processor only has so many cycles per second. In each cycle, scheduling software directs it how to spend its computational time. It can do some of this thing, and some of another thing, but it only has so many cycles in a second to do that work, and no more. Similarly, you too have a choice about what you spend time thinking about. You have only so many hours in a day, and so many days in your life, and you have a significant measure of freedom to choose how you are going to spend that time engaging your mind—or trying not to! You can engage it with one thing or another. You must make a conscious choice about that—what to work on, what to think on in free time, what to watch, what to read: because all that stuff is “thinking.”

- E. **Lovely.** That which is agreeable, pleasing, delightful, *and* all the above and below as well. It is not sinfully pleasing, but holy in pleasure.
- F. **Good report.** Praiseworthy, commendable.
- G. **Anything of virtue.** Virtuous, excellence in character. The “anything” shows there is latitude in this instruction, and you must discern if the things of your thought life are virtuous. There are many such things, but there are also many things that do not qualify.
- H. **Anything praiseworthy.** Anything worthy of admiration or recognized or approved for its true good.
- I. **Meditate on these things.** To “meditate” on these things means to give careful thought, to reckon, to consider, ponder, or dwell on. That is easy enough to say, but how do we implement such a thinking pattern?
 1. To do so takes energetic mental effort. Sometimes we like to put our minds into neutral, say by watching something on the television or computer. But then our mind is engaged in thinking about what we are seeing. That is a form of meditation. If your mind is truly in neutral, then other things may well fill it. Other times we are consumed with thinking about problem X or situation Y or worry Z, or worshipping God, or praying, or

balancing our checkbook or reading our Bible, or working on some home project, or whatever. These things fill our mind and do not allow room for other things at that time. This is why I strongly advocate that you keep busy with godly, productive things to engage your mind with those activities. If you are often idle, your flesh will find things to fill your mind. Idle *minds* are the Devil's workshop.

2. Long-established patterns of bad thought are hard to fix. Make a faith-filled, concerted effort to establish new heavenly patterns of thought. Set your mind on heavenly things (Colossians 3:2). Check yourself with this question: "Should I be thinking like this? Should I be thinking about this?" If a quick comparison to true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, praiseworthy, etc. fails, then switch mental gears and direct your brain to think about other stuff. Is the brain-clutch grinding and not wanting to shift gears, or it keeps popping back into the previous gear? Keep working at it! As with a transmission, you may have to do a flush to get out some of the old and fill with some new. Push out the old with a good dose of the new from God's word!

II. Other Scriptures

- A. Corporate thinking. Be of "one mind." This does not demand sameness of all thoughts. It requires union of purpose. We must not become so myopic or blinkered that we lose sight of the big picture of what we are doing—worshipping God, receiving instruction, fellowship, evangelism to make disciples, etc.

1 Chron. 12:38, Rom. 15:6, 2 Cor. 13:11, Phil. 1:27, 2:2; 1 Peter 3:8.

- B. United heart both in individual, Psalm 86:11, and in group, Acts 4:32.

III. Applications

- A. Think good about your spouse. Think of new ways to say things, or new things to say, to bless her or him, or encourage. Think of all the ways your spouse has blessed you. Keep a record of those things. Re-imagine him or her doing something for you in the past that was so nice.

- B. Similarly about an extended or close family member. What would loving thoughts do for that person? Good thoughts? True and noble thoughts? Fill your mind with what it would be like if you loved the person more wholly. Pray for them, figure out ways to serve them, how you can encourage them to grow in spiritual truth.
- C. How have you been thinking about fellow church members lately? Honest, just, pure, lovely thoughts about the person? How can you cultivate more such thinking?
- D. We talked last week about our political figures. So much is negative, because negative “sells.” But negative does not match virtuous and praiseworthy.
- E. How about your parents...do you have some good and patient thoughts for them?
- F. Suppose you have a very pesky neighbor. Maybe one who has said false things about you, or who has lied, or who has tattled on you, or who scares you! How can you think good in such a case? If it is feasible, do something good for them (Romans 12:17-21).
- G. When you see random people while you are out and about, what thoughts come to mind? Selfish thoughts or critical thoughts or pure and compassionate thoughts?
- H. Cultivating thinking like this takes time and effort. But it will reward you with a more full and joyful and positive life. You will reap *something* good from thinking right, even if not everything in your life goes right.

Conclusion

Thinking is a very personal thing. I cannot get into your head. Only you know what is there (1 Cor. 2:11). But you can tell other people what is there. And God knows what is in there!

Jesus came to rescue us from every evil deed and thought. Moreover, He through the Word of God and the Spirit of God helps His people to think good. Apart from Him you cannot succeed in thinking good.

MAP