

The Gospel-Driven Mind

Philippians 4:8–9

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Introduction

We return again this morning to the fourth chapter of Paul’s letter to the Philippians. Philippians chapter 4. And as we’ve examined this chapter over the past few months we have found ourselves in the midst of Paul’s directives to the people of God as it regards *spiritual stability*. The exhortation in chapter 4 verse 1, in which Paul calls us to “stand firm in the Lord,” sets the agenda for this concluding section of exhortations that we see in verses 2 through 9. He is calling us to spiritual *steadfastness*. He is concerned that the people of God be a spiritually *stable* people—firmly fixed on the solid rock of Jesus Christ. He is calling us to stand fast—to be unwavering and immovable in our commitment to Christ and to His Word—even as we face the pressures of a society that is hostile to us precisely because of that commitment. The church must be marked by spiritual stability.

But among all that we’ve spoken about on this topic of true, biblical steadfastness, there are two overarching, sort of all-encompassing categories of spiritual *instability* that threaten the church in every age. And those marks of spiritual instability run rampant through the church today, and are in large measure a cause for the unhealthiness of the professing evangelical church.

The first is what you’d call anti-intellectualism—an intellectual laziness—an aversion to deep and focused thinking. In keeping with our culture of instant gratification, many professing Christians are marked by a spirit that desires every spiritual lesson you try to teach them to be microwaveable. Teaching from the Word of God has to be served up, ready-made, in easily digestible portions. The moment you require them to quiet themselves, to gird up the loins of their minds, and to examine and evaluate and reflect upon what a given text might be saying—to closely follow a precise line of argumentation, or to think through how one portion of Scriptural teaching harmonizes with another portion—they check out.

I can’t tell you how many times I’ve had even dear friends of mine, in their desire to steer clear of the deep end of the theological pool, say to me, “Mike, I’m just a simple guy. I’m not all that smart, definitely not an academic type, and I’m not even all that big a fan of reading.” And I’d say, “But these are the truths of *God*, the means by which you get to know more of *Him!*—things into which even the *angels* long to look!” And they’d say something like, “Look, Jesus’ disciples didn’t have PhDs! They were *fishermen!* Just regular blue-collar guys.” And so they confuse biblical simplicity with being *simplistic*. They imagine that if every thought in the Christian life

is not immediately accessible to someone of below-average intelligence with very little mental strain on their part, then that thought must be convoluted by human reason and inherently unbiblical.

On the other end of the spectrum, there is an equal and opposite error that characterizes many Christians. These are the people who love to have the conversations I was just speaking about. They're the intellectuals—the good students. They love devoting their mind to the study of exalted themes—to Scripture and theology. That kind of thing excites them. They could tell you all about the historical context of Obadiah at the drop of a hat. They could wax eloquent about the fine points of distinction between supralapsarianism and infralapsarianism. They may even have a great interest in apologetics, in defending the faith against attacks from unbelievers.

And yet, despite their commitment to giving their minds to the study and consideration of the loftiest of themes, these people always seem to be making the least progress in sanctification. (Note: I'm not saying that those who give themselves to diligent study are always deficient in grace. Quite the opposite is the case, actually. I'm saying that *some* of those people given to diligent study can know a lot and practice little.) They have become great *theoreticians*, and yet they don't seem to have the self-discipline to translate all that knowledge into godly practice. It's as if they're content with the theory only—as if they believe the Christian life consists merely in thinking the right thoughts about things or having the right theology. But they don't seem to realize that *the whole purpose* of theology—the whole *purpose* of disciplined study, *the whole purpose* of thinking deeply—is so that they might put into practice what they learn, that their lives might be shaped and driven by the Word of God.

Both of these errors—both *intellectual* laziness, and *practical* laziness—are deadly threats to the true, biblical steadfastness and spiritual stability that Paul calls us to in Philippians chapter 4. Why? Well, think about it. Of all the means Paul provides by which we are to attain to this steadfastness—unity in the body of Christ in verses 2 and 3, joy in the Lord in verse 4, a spirit of gentleness as we interact with others, verse 5, and even battling anxiety by means of thankful prayer in verses 6 and 7—every single one of those things requires that we think, and meditate, and reflect upon the truth of God and how we might best go about putting them into practice. If Paul means to fuel our progress in gentleness by telling us, “the Lord is near,” surely he wants us to think, and meditate, and reflect upon the certainty of the Lord's coming, and the implications of His return has in the believer's life; and how those implications bear on our being gentle with others.

And every single one of those means of stability requires that we take them *out* of the realm of theory and ideas and discipline ourselves to actually put them into practice. It does no good to settle it in your mind that you are going to forgive that brother or sister with whom you've had some conflict—to come to terms with Paul's instruction that you *must* be of the same mind in the

Lord—and yet never actually go to that person to restore unity. You can have a perfectly biblical *understanding* of the necessity of Christian unity in the body of Christ, and yet without the self-discipline to put those principles for unity into *practice*, you can never hope to avail yourselves of the means that Paul provides for spiritual stability.

The abandonment of godly thinking and the abandonment of godly practice are absolutely toxic to true, biblical steadfastness. Neither of these errors characterizes the spiritually stable man or woman of God. The spiritually stable Christian is the one who gives himself to the rigors of deep and disciplined thought, *and* who gives himself to the diligent application and practice of the truth he claims to know.

And so in our text this morning, Paul deals a death blow—a crippling one-two punch!—to these twin errors. Read the text with me. Philippians 4, verses 8 and 9: “Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.”

Paul seeks to equip us to battle the twin errors of *intellectual* laziness and *practical* laziness by means of a **twofold summons**. In verse 8 he issues a **summons to godly thinking**, and in verse 9 he issues a **summons to godly practice**.¹ These verses constitute the climax of all that Paul has taught on what it means to stand firm in the Lord. Unity, joy, gentleness, and killing anxiety through prayer—all of that teaching culminates in the principles that Paul issues in verses 8 and 9. As we see by Paul’s use of the word, “Finally,” at the beginning of verse 8, these verses act as a summary of all that has gone before. And their relationship to the other graces is such that without faithfully submitting to these two imperatives, we will fail to truly implement all the rest.

And so in our time together this morning we’re going to examine these **two overarching, summarizing directives** so that we might successfully implement these means of spiritual stability.

I. A Summons to Godly Thinking (v. 8)

In the first place, then, let us consider this **summons to godly thinking**. Read verse 8 with me again. Paul writes, “Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, *dwell on* these things.”

¹ These headings are adapted from the titles of two separate sermons by Albert N. Martin.

Now the key word in that sentence is the command that comes just at the end, and I want to consider that first. Paul commands us to “ *dwell on these things.*” And this word that the NAS translates “ *dwell on,*” is the Greek word *logizomai*, from which we get the word *logic* and *logical*. And so its basic meaning is “to think.” But the NAS has done a good job in translating it “ *dwell on,*” because it’s not the word that you would expect Paul to use for just regular thinking. This is a word that calls for reflection, for intentional consideration, for pondering, for taking into account, and for letting one’s mind dwell on something. The Apostle Paul uses this word in Romans chapter 6 verse 11, when he exhorts the child of God, “Even so *consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.*” “ *Think of yourself this way; meditate on these truths of the Gospel such that you can come to regard yourself as dead to sin and alive to God in Christ.*” This is a patient deliberation and evaluation that allows one sufficient time and seriousness to come to grips with a certain reality.

And note: it is this kind of reflective, considerate, ponderous, meditative thinking that Paul commands us to in this verse. This kind of serious thinking is *commanded* of every believer. “Whatever is true, honorable, right, pure,” and so on, “ *dwell on these things.*” It’s a command! Just as much as we are commanded not to steal—but to work with our own hands that we might have goods to share with those in need (Eph 4:28)—just as much as we are commanded not to lie—but to speak truth each one with his neighbor (Eph 4:25)—just as much as we are commanded not to murder or commit adultery, so are we are commanded to think—and think *rigorously*—in the Christian life. And not only is it an imperative, it is a *present* imperative, which means it is a duty we are to carry out continuously and at all times. This kind of sober and reflective thought upon the noblest of things is to characterize our life. We are not commanded to dwell on these things only some of the time—in especially set-aside blocks of time which we devote for serious study. No, this is to be the constant pattern of our lives. We are to be continually considering, and reflecting, and dwelling upon these spiritual virtues, meditating on their implications.

Commentator Walter Hansen summarizes the thought helpfully. He writes, “Paul is calling for followers of Christ to be attentive, reflective, meditative thinkers. Developing a Christian mind and character requires a lifetime of discerning and disciplined thought...” (299).

And this centrality of the mind is a theme that is replete throughout the Scriptures. In Matthew 22:37, the Lord Jesus says that the greatest commandment in the Law is, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your *mind.*” In Romans 12:2, Paul commands, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” Transformation into Christlikeness happens by the renewing of our *mind.* Christianity is a lifelong renewal of the *mind.* In Romans 8:5, Paul says what you set your mind on is reflective of who you are. He writes, “For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the

Spirit.” The Proverbs put that same sentiment so simply, Proverbs 23 verse 7: “For as [a man] *thinks* within himself, so he is.” In Colossians chapter 3, Paul says our union with Christ in His death and resurrection has consequences for our minds. He says, “Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.” And in contrast to those who think that every legitimate spiritual truth should be immediately obvious and accessible with little concentrated thought, Paul writes in 2 Timothy 2:7: “*Consider* what I say,” or the ESV: “*Think over* what I say,” or the NIV: “*Reflect on* what I say,” “for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.” By what means will the Lord give you understanding in everything? When you consider, think over, and reflect on the Scripture that Paul is writing to us.

And so it makes sense that Pastor John would say, in reference to this text, that “Careful thinking is the distinctive mark of the Christian faith” (MacArthur, 286). That’s quite a statement, but it’s a legitimate representation of Paul’s teaching in this text. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, commenting on Jesus’ instruction not to worry in the Sermon on the Mount—a text we read in last week’s sermon (Matt 6:25–34)—wrote this: “Christian faith is essentially thinking. Look at the birds, think about them, and draw your deductions. Look at the grass, look at the lilies of the field, consider them” (*Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, 399).

And remember, again, by placing this command *here*, in a portion of Scripture which functions as the summary and culmination of previous directives on maintaining spiritual stability, Paul is plainly teaching us that spiritual stability is a result of how a person *thinks* (cf. MacArthur, 285).

The wisdom of the world conceives of faith as an irrational leap in the dark—something that takes over in spite of all manner of sound reason; or a content-less, mystical encounter with the spiritual realm achieved by *emptying* your mind; or merely positive thinking, as if your thoughts and beliefs had effectual and creative power to them. But cutting across the grain of *all* of that, Scripture says (a) the Christian life is *dominated* by filling the mind with God’s revelation as He’s given it to us in the Bible, (b) that understanding comes by considering and reflecting on what Scripture says, and, here in our text in Philippians 4, (c) that you will not grow in grace—you will not be spiritually stable—unless you are deliberately cultivating a habit of meditating on and thinking deeply about the truths of God’s Word.

Now, we’ve clearly seen the central importance that thinking and the mind have in the Christian life. But this text doesn’t only highlight the necessity of thinking; it also directs us as to the *content* of our thoughts—what we are to think about. It does no good to be persuaded that you must exercise your mind in the Christian life if you set your mind on the wrong things. And so again we have the statement from the Apostle Paul that the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace (Rom 8:6). We are told, “Set your mind on the things

above, not on the things that are on earth” (Col 3:2). You see, not only does the Gospel limit the boundaries of what we believe; not only does it limit the boundaries of what we do—the practices we involve ourselves in. The implications of the Gospel reach even to our *thoughts*. As Paul said in 2 Corinthians chapter 10 verse 5, we are to take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.

And in this verse Paul gives us **six specific virtues** upon which we are to fix our minds—and then **two** virtues stated **more generally** so as to make his comprehensive intent plain. And we’ll briefly examine each of these virtues in their turn.

A. True

First, Paul says we are to dwell on whatever is true. The things that are true are those things which correspond to reality. The things that are true stand in direct contrast to all that is false and fantasy. As Christians, as followers of the Lord Jesus Christ who said of Himself, “I am the truth,” (John 14:6; cf. Eph 4:21), as children of the living God whom Scripture calls “the God of truth” (Ps 31:5; Isa 65:16; cf. Rom 3:4), we are not to give our minds to that which is false. We are not to expose our minds for extended periods of time on falsehood and fantasy. We are to be preoccupied with the truth, with reality.

And of course God is the ultimate arbiter of what reality *is*, and He has set truth and reality before us in His precious Word. Jesus Himself said, “Your word is truth” (John 17:17). David says in Psalm 19:9, speaking of the Word of God, “The judgments of the Lord are true,” and in Psalm 119:151 the psalmist says, “All Your commandments are truth.”

And so to dwell upon whatever is true means to give ourselves over to reflection, to meditation, to ruminating upon the Word of God as it is revealed in Scripture. It is as we read, and analyze, and think upon, and *consider* what is said (cf. 2 Tim 2:7), that we will obey this command to fix our minds upon whatever is true. And then, as we grow accustomed to this Word—as it makes its home within us—we internalize that standard of truth, and become able to discern those things in the world which are true and which are false, which are reliable and which are unreliable, which are in accord with God’s own mind and in accord with the Gospel and which are not.

B. Honorable

Secondly, we are to dwell upon whatever is honorable. This word refers to that which is noble, that which is lofty and dignified and majestic and august, that which is worthy of respect and reverence. It’s the opposite of that which is frivolous and mundane. The word is used frequently throughout the Pastoral Epistles to describe the conduct of men and women of *dignity*. In Titus

2:2, Paul instructs that “Older men are to be temperate, *dignified*, and sensible...” In Titus 2:7 and 8, he instructs Titus, “in all things show yourself to be an example of good deeds, with purity in doctrine, *dignified*, sound in speech which is beyond reproach, so that the opponent will be put to shame, having nothing bad to say about us.” In 1 Timothy 3:8 we are told that “Deacons likewise must be men of *dignity*...” And that requirement is repeated for the women in 1 Timothy 3:11: “Women must likewise be *dignified*, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things.”

And so there is that common thread of dignity, of nobility, of gravity—and that’s how the older translations rendered that word: gravity. We are not to be frivolous and flippant, dominated by a perpetual levity such that everything is a joke and we cannot be serious. The Puritan Thomas Manton said, “A garish levity will not become them that live in constant communion with God” (*Works*, 18:97). You see, there is to be something about us Christians, even in our demeanor, that makes it plain to the world that we live in constant contact and communion with the God of Heaven Himself. That doesn’t mean that we are to be overly solemn or morose or gloomy; if you think I’m saying that, be sure to review the message on rejoicing in the Lord always in Philippians 4:4. But there is to be a gravity about us as those who live in the presence of God.

And so that means we must turn our thoughts to lofty, elevated, transcendent themes. We are not to fill our minds with trivialities and frivolities, but with things that worthy of awe and adoration—as one writer said, “things that lift the mind from the cheap and tawdry to that which is noble and good and of moral worth” (Martin & Hawthorne, 251). You hear Pastor John say this all the time in the worship service—usually after the instrumental or the offertory—that we purposefully employ the kind of worship music that is transcendent and elevated, that isn’t ugly and coarse and garish.

C. Right

Thirdly, we are to set our minds upon whatever is right. And this is the same word that refers to God’s righteousness—that is, whatever conforms to the standard that is set by God’s own holy character and nature as it is revealed in Scripture. God Himself is righteous, and so our minds are to be given to thinking over and meditating upon Him and His attributes—His perfections, as the old writers used to call them. And not only *is* He righteous but all that He *does* is righteous. And so like the people of God throughout the ages we are to call to mind the righteous acts of the Lord and worship Him for all He does.

“Whatever is right” speaks of justice, of balanced scales. So think of it this way: on one side of the scale you have the purity and holiness that are essential to God’s own nature; and on the other side of the scale is our mind, the things that occupy our thoughts and attention. Paul is

saying that what goes into our mind must be in proportion to God's own righteousness (cf. Lawson).

It also means that we do not fix our minds and muse upon ways to beat the system, to cheat others, and to cut corners to get ahead. We are not to be schemers, Proverbs 6:18; one of the six things the Lord hates is "a heart that devises wicked plans." Rather than devising wicked plans, we are to devise holy plans. We are to think upon situations of conversation and interaction with other believers, and give thought to how we might bring grace and edification with our words in that situation—how we might encourage others by being considerate. So far from devising wicked plans, we are to let our minds be preoccupied with how we can be upright, just, fair, and see to it that no one within our sphere of influence is defrauded or taken advantage of.

D. Pure

Fourth, we are to dwell upon whatever is pure. Purity, of course, speaks of holiness, of integrity—those things which are not tainted in some way by evil (Fee, 418). Paul uses this word to describe a *pure* virgin in 2 Corinthians 11:2. It's translated "chaste" in 1 Peter 3:2, as Peter instructs women of disobedient husbands to be submissive to them such that they might win them without a word spoken, he says, "as they observe your *chaste* and respectful behavior." And so this speaks of moral purity, of uprightness, and even of innocence, being free from guilt and blemish (cf. 2 Cor 7:11).

And surely this has strong implications for those things we choose for our entertainment—the things we occupy ourselves with for recreation. This has implications for our choice of leisure reading material. It has implications for our TV-watching. It has implications for our choice of movies. It has implications for our Internet-surfing. And I'm sure that the Philippians would have loved for Paul to give them an exhaustive list here! "*This* theater is acceptable, but don't go to *that* play. You can attend *that* gathering, but *this* one is off limits" (cf. Lawson). But Paul doesn't tread on the ground of cultural legalism. In the wisdom of God, he gives us *principles* that we are to meditate upon and internalize, and then within those boundaries we are to apply those principles according to our Scripture-informed conscience. We are to dwell upon *whatever is pure!*

And so if you deliberately put yourself in the way of books, and magazines, and TV shows, and movies, and websites that are going to expose your minds to sexual impurity, to foul language, and to sinful patterns of life, you are in violation of this text. We are to fix our eyes and our minds on what is pure. When we're tempted to dwell upon those things which are *impure*, we must, as the song says, turn our eyes upon Jesus, look full in His wonderful face, and pray with all our might that the things of the world will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace! 1 John 3:2 calls us: Beloved, we are children of God! And we know that when He, that is,

Jesus, appears we will be like Him, because we will *see* Him as He is! And *everyone*, verse 3, who has this hope *fixed on Him purifies* himself, just as He is *pure*!

E. Lovely

Fifth, we are to dwell upon whatever is lovely. This refers to those things which call forth and inspire love, that which is pleasing, and agreeable, and amiable, and lovely (O'Brien, 505). One commentator says these things "give pleasure to all and cause distaste to none, like a welcome fragrance" (Bruce, 121). That's a lovely illustration: a welcome fragrance. Something that makes you just want to stop and take a deep breath and take in that refreshing fragrance.

The contrast would be an offensive odor. Like getting too close to someone who, it's evident, has been quite, shall we say, active on a hot day. Like walking by an open sewer gate on the street and smelling that raw sewage. Like we said about those things which are honorable and dignified, we are to give our minds to winsome and delightful things—elevated and lovely things, not that which is raw, and crude, and ugly, and distasteful.

F. Of Good Repute

And then, sixth, we are to dwell upon whatever is of good repute—whatever has a good reputation, whatever is spoken well of by those whose minds are upright.

And then finally, Paul reaches the crescendo with these final two, all-encompassing, catch-all terms: "If there is *any* excellence and if *anything* worthy of praise, dwell on these things." "If I have left anything out in my list of virtues with which you are to occupy your mind, if there is anything in the world that comes under the heading of moral excellence, and if there is anything that is worthy of praise before God and godly men, dear people, think on *these* things! Be occupied with *these* things! Give your mind and your attention and your energy to *these* things!"

You see, friends, we are not to give ourselves to the constant preoccupation with evil. We are to examine ourselves before God and ask Him to search us and try us and see if there be any hurtful way in us (Ps 139:23–24). But we are not to be morbidly introspective regarding our own sinfulness. Some of you are so constantly focused on your own failures that you're anxious, and depressed, and despondent. Paul calls you to look *outside* of yourselves and *away* from yourselves to the loveliness and virtue of Christ, and to trust in Him who accomplished righteousness in your place!

Neither are we to be inordinately preoccupied with the evils in the *world*. Yes, God has called us to be discerning, but some of you have a morbid preoccupation with the evils in the world! All that occupies your mind is the corruption of the government, the injustices of society, conspiracy

theories, the potential for wars and whether the political climate is ripe for the arrival of the Antichrist! Others of you have fostered a critical spirit when it comes to the weakness of the visible church, the failures of other professing Christians to make progress in grace, and so on and so forth. But Paul says if there is any *excellence*, and anything *worthy of praise*, dwell on *these* things, beloved!

II. A Summons to Godly Practice (v. 9)

And so we have been summoned to godly *thinking*. But now we come to verse 9, where Paul issues his **summons to godly *practice***. Read both verses again with me: “Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. The things,” or, more literally translated, “*which* things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, *practice* these things, and the God of peace will be with you.”

Now, the first thing to notice here is the inseparable connection between verses 8 and 9, and I tried to bring that out to you even as I read the text. Paul gives his list of whatever is true, and whatever is honorable, and whatever is right, and then he says, “Dwell on these things, *which things* you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice *these* things.” In other words, “The very things I am telling you to set your minds upon are the things that you have learned and received *from* me, and have heard and seen *in* me. And now, in addition to thinking on those things, I am now also calling you to *practice* those things.”

A. Godly Thinking is the Root of Godly Practice

So we learn here that thinking is not only necessary for the Christian life in some general sense. Rather, **thinking is the absolutely necessary *foundation* for Christian living**. That’s why Paul puts these exhortations in the order that he does. First, we are to fix our minds upon whatever is true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, and of good repute. We are to consider those things, to meditate on them, to devote all our attention to them and even to devise ways of bringing them about in our lives. And then, having filled our minds with those things, we are to bring them into our daily practice.

See, right behavior doesn’t just spring up out of nowhere. Right behavior comes from right thinking. **The wholesome fruit of godly *practice* comes from the properly kept and cultivated soil of godly *thinking***. You see, truth is first perceived in the *mind*. And as it is perceived and understood in the mind, that truth molds your affections—what you love and hate, what you desire and long for and what you repudiate. And your affections then excite your will. And your will then directs your actions. So it all comes back to the mind. Your actions will not

be right unless your mind is right. This is why the psalmist prayed, “Give me understanding, *that* I may observe Your law And keep it with all my heart” (Psalm 119:34). Why would he not simply pray that he would keep the law with all his heart? Because he knew that first his *mind*, his *understanding* had to be affected.

And so godly thinking is the absolutely essential foundation for godly practice. The person who aims to bring forth the good fruit of godly practice without being firmly rooted in the soil of sound theology is like that seed which sprouted among the rocky soil. It springs up quickly and makes a good show of things on the outside, but as time passes it withers away. Why? Because it has no root. The Bible teaches us that the *fruit* of God-glorifying deeds come directly from the *root* of God-glorifying creeds.

B. Godly Practice is the Necessary Fruit of Godly Thinking

And so that answers the first error that we spoke about at the beginning—that intellectual laziness that refuses to engage in any serious thought and is only worried about what things look like on the outside. But this text also addresses that second error—that *practical* laziness that is content with theory only, and that fails to put the theology he knows into practice. In fact, theology not practiced is theology aborted. As I said before, the whole purpose of disciplined study of the Scriptures and deep theological thought is to have the truth mold your affections, have your affections inform your will, and have your will spur you on to love and good deeds. That is the teaching of this text. Just as surely as Paul commanded us to think, Paul also commands us, verse 9: “*Practice* these things.”

I love the comments Martyn Lloyd-Jones makes on this point. He writes, “You see the perfection of the Apostle’s method? In verse 8 he has dealt with the realm of thought. Ah, but the Apostle knows the subtle danger that is always confronting us, the danger of being content with theoretical knowledge, the danger of being satisfied with doctrine only, the danger of failing to put into practice that which we know. . . . You can be a great student even of the Bible and live a life that is utterly contrary to it. . . . It is the masterpiece of Satan to make us put theory and practice into separate watertight compartments, to make men so interested in the Book that they forget to apply its teaching. What you have seen, says Paul, practice!” (*Life of Peace*, 194, 196).

And those comments are everywhere confirmed by Scripture. James writes, in chapter 1 verse 22 of his epistle: “But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does.”

The Lord Jesus, in John chapter 13, Jesus models the life of sacrificial service that His followers are to render to one another as He, the Master, washes the feet of His slaves. He tells them that He's done so to leave them an example. And in verse 17 He says, "If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them." What's the implication? If you know these things and *don't* do them, you are *not* blessed. The Puritan Thomas Brooks, in his excellent treatise, *Precious Remedies against Satan's Devices*, comments on this verse: "Know that it is not the knowing, nor the talking, nor the reading man—but the doing man, that at last will be found the happiest man."

And finally, turn to Matthew chapter 7. These are the final words of the Sermon on the Mount. After all Jesus has said in that magnificent sermon about the nature of His Kingdom and the character of the subjects of that Kingdom, this is what He wants left ringing in the ears of His hearers. Matthew 7 verse 24: "Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine *and acts on them*, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. Everyone who hears these words of Mine *and does not act on them*, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall." If you want to build on solid rock, and not on the sinking sand, you must *think* on these things, but you also must *practice* these things.

C. The Means of Godly Practice

You say, "OK, Mike. You've convinced me. I need to put my theology into practice. But how do I do that? How do I go about bringing forth the good fruit of godly practice in my life?" Our text answers that question as well. Look with me again at verse 9: "The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things."

And I see two categories of thought there. The first means of implementing godly practice is to appropriate godly instruction. Paul speaks of the things the Philippians learned and received from him. The things they learned and received refer to the teaching and instruction Paul imparted to them while he was with them. Their learning of it emphasizes more Paul's initial instruction to them, and their receiving it emphasizes more that the instruction had taken root in their hearts, but both are referring to the same reality.

In 1 Thessalonians 2:13, Paul speaks of the Thessalonians *receiving* the Word of God not as if it were the word of men, but as it really was: as the Word of God. But the content of his instruction wasn't merely the doctrines of the grace of the Gospel of Christ—as precious as those doctrines are. He also instructed them in Christian *living*. 1 Thessalonians 4:1 says, "...we request and

exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us instruction *as to how you ought to walk* and please God... that you excel still more.” Note that: He instructed them both in Christian *doctrine* and in Christian *living*. And now he calls the Philippians to appropriate that instruction. How are you going to bring forth the good fruit of godly practice in your daily life? Well, first you’re going to appropriate the godly instruction that you’ve received from your leaders.

And secondly, you’re going to emulate godly examples. Paul says that the Philippians had not only learned and received from him instruction in these things. He also says that they have observed these things practiced in his own life, and can follow his godly example. The things you *heard* refer to the reports that others would have brought to the Philippians regarding the Apostle Paul. Those like Timothy and Epaphroditus who had been with him in his trials were able to tell the Philippians of the faith and the steadfastness and the courage with which he was facing his imprisonment, his upcoming trial before Nero, his persecution at the hands of rival preachers, and so on. The Philippians would say, “How’s he doing? Is he discouraged?” And Timothy and Epaphroditus could say, “Praise God, no! He has fastened his mind upon truth, and on those things that are right and honorable and lovely, and he is practicing these things as well!” And the Philippians would have an example in their dear Apostle.

And the things they *saw* in him refer to that pattern of life that they had been able to observe with their own eyes when he was with them—seeing that he not only talked the talk but walked the walk! They were able to observe that Paul lived and ministered in integrity, because the very things that he preached were the things that he practiced (cf. Phil 1:30; 3:17; 1 Cor 4:16; 11:1).

And though my time is nearly gone, the brief word of application I have for you at this point is to grasp how vitally important discipleship is in the Christian life. This godly teaching that you are to appropriate and this godly example that you are to emulate—this doesn’t come from sitting on your couch in your pajamas watching the live stream of the service! And listen, it doesn’t even *primarily* come from coming to church, and coming to GraceLife, and listening to sermons (though it is certainly not *less* than that). This is entering into and cultivating relationships with other believers who are sound in the faith, and in some cases who are more mature in the faith than you are, and committing yourselves to living life together, navigating its various trials alongside one another. There needs to be a person like the Apostle Paul in your life to whom you look for specific and practical instruction—both in Christian doctrine and in the daily, everyday aspects of Christian living—that you might learn to *put into practice* the things which you’re taught.

And Phil and I and your other pastors and elders know that that’s our responsibility, and we take it very seriously. And we wish we could know every one of you personally and disciple you individually on a regular basis. And though we have the joy of doing that with some of you, Christ hasn’t designed the church so that the pastors do all the work of the ministry, but,

Ephesians 4:12, that they *equip the saints* for the work of the ministry. And so you need to do that with one another, friends! And the principal way in which that happens at a church as large as ours is through home Bible studies. You need to be faithfully attending one of our Bible studies, friends, where you can walk alongside 15 or 20 other Christians trying to please Christ in the same challenging world that you live in—where you can be shepherded and cared for by a team of men who are trained and willing to do so. So don't cut yourself off from that blessing any longer. Get into a Bible study, and pour your life into the people there.

Conclusion: The Reward for Godly Thinking and Practice

And if you do that—if you give yourself to the discipline of sound, biblical, godly thinking, and if you commit yourself to putting that theory into practice by appropriating godly instruction and by emulating godly examples—Paul has a promise of reward for you at the end of verse 9. He says, so think, and so practice, and the consequence will be that “the God of peace will be with you.”

What a *glorious* promise! To the extent that we fix our minds upon all that is excellent and praiseworthy, and to the extent that we practice the truth that we have learned, we will enjoy the presence of the God of peace Himself! We will enjoy deeper dimensions of intimacy and communion with Him than we ever thought possible while we were giving our minds to lesser things or failing to bring into practice what we knew. We will enjoy the sweet fellowship of God Himself with an uncondemned conscience—the likes of which careless walkers in the Christian life will never know (cf. Martin).

And that presence of God will bring the peace it brought to Moses, who, when he said, “Who am I, that I should go Pharaoh and command *him*, the ruler of this entire empire, to let the Israelites go?” God responded, “Certainly *I* will be *with* you...” (Exod 3:11–12). It will bring the peace it brought to Joshua, who, as he was leading the second generation of Israelites out from the wilderness and into the land of Canaan to conquer it, was promised, “Just as I have been with Moses, I will be *with* you; I will not fail you or forsake you” (Josh 1:5). It will bring the peace it brought to David who wrote those beautiful words, “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for *You* are *with* me” (Ps 23:4).

Oh friends, is not that promise—that the God of peace Himself shall be with you—is that not sufficient to elicit from you the most diligent and devoted self-discipline, both of your mind and of your life? Is not a deeper relationship with *Him* motive enough to put these principles into practice?

If not, you need to examine yourself as to whether you've been born again. [See audio for Gospel presentation.]

And for my brothers and sisters who know Christ, I point you to Christ just the same. Pursue *Him*, in whom all these virtues are summed up.

I want to close with the words of that great Scottish expositor, Alexander MacLaren. He writes: “All these things, true, venerable, just, pure, lovely, and of good report, are not things only; they are embodied in a Person. For whatever things are fair meet in Jesus Christ, and He, in His living self, is the sum of all virtue and of all praise. So that if we link ourselves to Him by faith and love, and take Him into our hearts and minds, and abide in Him, we have them all gathered together into that One. Thinking on these things is not merely a meditating upon abstractions, but it is clutching and living in and with and by the living, loving Lord and Saviour of us all. If Christ is in my thoughts, all good things are there.”

May we cling to Him.