



Stand Firm in the Lord, Part 5 – Think About These Things

Series: *Philippians – To Live Is Christ*

Philippians 4:8-9

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Last week’s text and the sermon that came from it generated a huge number of opportunities for ministry and discussion. Frankly, it surprised me just how much. And the conversations generally touched on the same themes. “Ok, I know anxiety is a sin, and I know I need to pray when it strikes me, but how do I battle it before it hits? Is this a part of sanctification? Will I always fight this? What about my other sins that lead to anxiety? How do I keep from being anxious about being anxious?” These are all great questions and they are questions that Paul, or rather, the Holy Spirit in and through Paul, anticipates and answers.

This text that we have before us this morning is one of the most important passages in the Word of God for living and thriving in the Christian life and that, beloved, is no exaggeration. This text is the prescription for dealing a crippling blow to anxiety before you ever face it, for defeating sin and worry, for defeating a host of others sins by bolstering faith and confidence in Christ, for growing in peace, for growing in godliness, and for a sound and strong, spiritual mind.

Now remember what Paul has been teaching us, the point of his exhortations and commands that we have looked at over the last several weeks. He is concerned that the Philippians and that all of the churches of Jesus Christ stand firm and stable in this present evil age. To that end, he has given to us some specific and spiritually significant commands, right? He has called us to gospel integrity in our relationships with one another. He had commanded us to rejoice in the Lord – to walk in an ongoing and continually refreshing joy in all circumstances, with our hope and focus in Christ. He has called us to be reasonable – that is, to pursue gentleness, meekness, graciousness, a sober evaluation of self, forbearance, and selflessness. He commanded us not to be anxious but in all things to pray, and we talked a great deal about that last week. And now the instruction is this: **“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.” (Philippians 4:8–9, ESV)

You might say that Paul saves the best for last, because in a lot of ways, this is the culmination of everything else that comes before it. The first thing that I want for us to do, this morning, is to reason together from Scripture about what it means to have a Christian mind.

The Christian Mind

Theologians, sometimes, spend a lot of time trying to decipher the difference between the heart and the mind, trying to split hairs. I am convinced this is neither useful nor helpful and let me tell you why. When you look through the Word of God, you see the word heart and mind used almost interchangeably, or spoken of in such concert with one another as to be almost indistinguishable. The heart or the mind is variously used to describe the seat of thinking, of understanding, of choosing, of motivation, and of feeling in a person. The two either are or are almost synonymous with one another or they are spoken of in such a way that they cannot be separated.

So let’s think about this. Before you were saved, before you came to know and believe in Christ as Savior and Lord, you had a debased or depraved mind. It is the state of every lost person you know. Romans 1 says: ***“For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools...” (Romans 1:21–22, ESV)*** Before you knew Christ, you lived in the lusts of your flesh, indulging the desires of your sinful nature and your darkened mind. Ephesians 2:3 says: ***“we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.” (Ephesians 2:3, ESV)*** Like the lost that Paul speaks of in Ephesians 4, you and I walked in the ***“futility of (our) minds... darkened in (our) understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that (was) in (us), due to (our) hardness of heart.” (Ephesians 4:17–18, ESV)***

Did God leave us in that condition? Not if you are saved, He didn't. He has regenerated our hearts and renewed our minds so that we would hear and believe the gospel of Christ. ² Corinthians 4 and starting in verse 3 says: ***“If our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”*** But for us, ***“God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”*** (2 Corinthians 4:3–4, 6, ESV)

Think about what Christ is for us in salvation, what He brings to us, what He grants us; it is absolutely amazing. ***“And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption,”*** (1 Corinthians 1:30, ESV) He is in Himself the source of our righteousness, our sanctification, our redemption – and don't miss this – our wisdom. And He has, according to Ephesians 4:23 and 24, caused us to ***“be renewed in the spirit of (our) minds,”*** so that we would ***“put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.”*** (Ephesians 4:23–24, ESV)

Further on in 1 Corinthians, Paul says: ***“For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God.”*** (1 Corinthians 2:11–12, ESV) Then he says, starting in verse 14: ***“The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. “For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?” But we have the mind of Christ.”*** (1 Corinthians 2:14–16, ESV) We are not like the natural, lost man in verse 14 who doesn't know anything about God since it is all foolishness to him. We have the mind of Christ, we have a new, renewed mind.

Colossians 3:10 says that in Christ, we ***“and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.”*** (Colossians 3:10, ESV) And because this is true, ***“though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ,”*** (2 Corinthians 10:3–5, ESV) We are to take every thought

captive to Christ, strain everything we think, everything we believe through the grid of Christ's truth. We can take every thought captive and make it submit to the truth that is in Christ.

You see, the mystery and the wonder of our minds as redeemed children of the Living God is that they have been fashioned, created, re-created, and renewed to think God's thoughts, to know His will, to know His character accurately, to think God's thoughts after Him and to have the mind of Christ. The scandal of our minds, however, is that very often, as Christians, we fall short of the mind of Christ. And that is why Paul commands us to be constantly renewing our minds. In Romans 12, in light of the gospel grace that we have received, Paul calls us not only to present our bodies in worship, but to be continually renewing our minds. ***"I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."*** (Romans 12:1–2, ESV)

The Christian mind is a great mystery and a great gift. It forms your whole life, be it what it may. All evil and all good come from your heart, from your mind. It is the key to spiritual life and death, to spiritual peace and turmoil, to spiritual strength and weakness.

Jonathan Edwards, one of the greatest theologians in American history made this observation that is spot on. He said: "The ideas and images in men's minds are the invisible powers that constantly govern them." And that is why we must take care to discipline our minds, to master our thinking. Like Paul wrote in Colossians 3:1, ***"If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth."*** (Colossians 3:1–2, ESV) Then Paul goes on to describe all sorts of moral implications that come from that command – the death of sin and the growth of godliness.

So, in this text, it is the cultivating of our minds and hearts that Paul has in view. He is only saying in different words and more specifically what we read in the book of Proverbs 4:23, ***"Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life."*** (Proverbs 4:23, ESV)

Two things before we move on. First, the fact that we have a Christian mind means that we are not like Pavlov's dogs. We are not stimulus-response beings. We are thinking beings. We are rational, morally responsible people. We are not governed by stimulus and response. We are fed that kind of garbage – its evolutionary psychology by the way – but it isn't true. It is a deception designed to remove personal responsibility from actions. We are not slaves to our feelings or slaves to circumstances. If we are, if we are like Pavlov's dogs, then everything that I have just expounded from the Word of God is a lie.

Second, we need to see that there is a very real difference between our bodies of flesh and our minds. We are not promised renewed bodies on this earth, are we? Our bodies will not be renewed and we will not receive a body like Christ's until we see Him face to face when He returns from glory to receive His people. But we have been given renewed minds right now. We have been given the mind of Christ right now. Not in the fullness that it will be when we see Him and every vestige of sin is wiped away forever, but we do have the mind of Christ in us now. That is a significant truth that forms the rest of what we will see this morning.

God, who knows the human mind and heart better than anyone else, tells us how to pursue and cultivate the mind of Christ, a sound mind, how to have a peace-filled mind, a spiritually healthy mind from which spiritually healthy living will proceed. Working out our salvation, the fullness of our redemption in every area of your living, Paul tells us here, extends to the way you think, where you focus your mind, what you dwell upon, what fills your thinking. Look at what Paul says:

The Command – Discipline Your Mind to Think Rightly (8) Paul says in verse 8: ***“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.”*** (Philippians 4:8, ESV)

Paul tells us how to cultivate the mind of Christ by disciplining our thinking and focusing our hearts and minds on what is good and pleasing before God. It is a matter of mastering our minds, of active and intentional control of our thoughts.

The word that is translated here as “think about” is a Greek word that means To ponder, to meditate upon, to give proper weight and influence to, to focus intently upon, to evaluate, and use to your faculties to understand and therefore affect and influence the way that you think and live. This is relentlessly demanding but graciously possible. What does Paul say we are to focus upon?

Whatever is true... We are to focus our minds on what is true in the most comprehensive sense. For us, it begins with Christ who is truth, the very embodiment of truth, truth incarnate. He is all truth and His words are all truth. His gospel is all truth. It means dwelling on all that He taught in His gospels, the meaning and intent of His miracles, the implications of His death and resurrection, the message of Christ throughout the Scriptures. We are to dwell upon and focus our minds on the revelation of God, in Three Persons, in the Word of God.

Whatever is honorable... We are to focus upon what is personally and morally excellent. What is dignified and noble, what leads to moral and spiritual worthiness and weight.

Whatever is just... We are to dwell upon what is righteous and just, in terms of thoughts and actions, as defined by the character of God.

Whatever is pure... We are to think about what is unmixed with evil. In our motives, our relationships, our communication, our sexual desires, in our interaction with the world, that which is defined as pure by God.

Whatever is lovely... We are to dwell upon those things that are beautiful to God, what is beautiful and in creation and in humanity. Physical and spiritual beauty.

Whatever is commendable... We are to dwell upon the kind of conduct that is pleasing to the Lord, the character and thinking that pleases Christ.

Then he sums it all up by saying: ***if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.*** Your spiritual mind, the mind of Christ, is one of the greatest and most important gifts of salvation – protect it, cultivate it. We are to meditate upon, to prize as valuable, and to have all of our thinking shaped by all that is true, all that merits serious thought, all that accords with righteousness and moral purity, all that is pure and lovely. In this way our minds are shaped like Christ’s mind.

Here is Paul’s point, the mind/heart is the source of all your thoughts, your feelings, your intentions, and the source that influences everything you think, believe and do. As the mind/heart grows in godliness, everything in your life must follow. Sometimes we treat our thoughts and the actions that spring from them, as if we have no control over them, as if they just come over us from somewhere out there, out of nowhere, but they don’t. The thoughts we have, our actions, spring from what we put in our hearts and minds. It may be true that the factors that cause temptations to lust, to lie, to be anxious, or to steal may be external but our response is not. ***“But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.” (James 1:14–15, ESV)*** What we put into our minds, what we think deeply about, what we meditate upon, directly and powerfully influences our thoughts, our desires and our actions.

Now listen, some may say of this kind of mental discipline, “It’s impossible. I’d have to move to a monastery. I live in the real world.” But listen to me; this is not some form of escapism. It is not a call to withdraw from society. It is not a call to withdraw from thinking critically and rightly about things. But it is a call to think rightly about things, to evaluate things, and to hold fast to what is good. Resolve to have your thoughts shaped by the mind of Christ.

Now I am not going to pretend that it isn’t hard work. It is hard work, by God’s empowering grace, to renew and reorient our minds according to the truth. And it is going to require that we stop taking our cues for the way that we think and the way that evaluate things from the world. Romans 8 is pretty clear on this. ***“For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. You,***

however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you.”
(Romans 8:5–9, ESV)

The thinking of the world is fleshly and if you are looking for your cues on how to think from the world, you are looking in the wrong place. The thinking of the world is plagued with violence, humanistic thought, worldliness, a disregard for God, eroticism, Christlessness, vanity, materialism and greed, pragmatism, hatred, love of self, sensuality and crudity.

“They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God’s righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.”

(Romans 1:29–32, ESV) This is the thinking of the world. You are assaulted by it continually. And it is impossible for any Christian who spends the bulk of his or her time investing his or her attention on the things of the world to have a Christian mind. That is always true of every Christian in every situation.

Think about what you put into your mind – TV, movies, music, magazines, books, the communications you have with other people, the things you believe, YouTube videos, mindless internet surfing . There are some thoughts and influences to which we have to say, “No!” There are some things that we cannot just irresponsibly give ourselves to and expect to have strong and sound Christian minds and lives. You cannot wallow in worldliness and have a sound mind. The world is insane. Lig Duncan says: “Now 24/7 on your television, on your radio, on your computer, on your iPod®, and on your cell phone through text messages you are being bombarded with the trivial and with the crude. If you do not deliberately plan to think on what is true and commendable, it's not going to come knocking to your door.” And beloved, he is right. We have to reject some things. You may think that these things don’t affect you, but you’re wrong. What you think about, what you dwell upon, what your mind goes to, is deeply affected by what you put into it, whether consciously or subconsciously.

We are being given ideas and philosophies all the time. Sometimes we are aware of those ideas and sometimes we are not. I remember back in the day when at movie theatres they would use subliminal messages. In a movie the theatre would insert several scattered frames into the movie that might show a bucket of popcorn, a glass of Coke, some candy. You

wouldn't be able to see these frames because they would go by so quickly, but your brain would see it and immediately you'd start desiring popcorn. It is that way with the world.

And that is why, above all else, we must discipline ourselves to consciously immerse and wash our minds in the Word of God. Jesus said of His disciples: ***“I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.”*** (John 17:15–17, **ESV**) We cannot cultivate a distinctively Christian mind any other way. We must be deliberately locked on to a pattern of meditating upon and reflecting on and thinking deeply on the truths of God’s Word. We must be continually washing our minds with the water of the word. There is no quick fix, no effortless solution.

Now I know that the pace and preoccupations of our lives, especially in our contemporary world, conspire together against this very thing. They do that together by preoccupying us with the trivial so that we never get around to the profound and the permanent, and by filling up our minds with the trivial so that there's no room left for anything really important, and by keeping our schedules so packed that there's no time to do any deep reflection. But, listen to me, ok? You cannot grow in Christ, you will never know the fullness of joy, the fullness of the Christian life, you will never know the fullness of the peace of God if you do not deliberately, and at the cost of some other things if necessary, devote yourself to knowing God and His Christ by meditating on the Word of God. It is a matter of making the right things the priority.

There is a difference between a cursory knowledge of God and the personal, meaningful knowledge of God and His Christ through the Scripture that is characterized by faith and repentance, by personal application, by mind-renewing thoughts and desires that are spiritually fruitful. There is a very real difference between having a Bible app or a verse a day, a blog that we read or even just the passive reception of God’s Word in a sermon, and hiding God’s Word in our hearts so we do not sin against Him.

One requires little of us. The other requires self-discipline, the quieting of our souls before the Lord, meditating on the Word, turning it over and over in our minds, praying the Scriptures, hiding His Word in our hearts, slowing down and engaging in deliberate

prolonged contemplation of God's truth. One costs little and yields little. One costs much and yields much.

Think of the words of the Psalmist in Psalm 119. Let me read a few verses and I want you to really think about them:

“How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word. With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments! I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.” (Psalm 119:9–11, ESV)

“In the way of your testimonies I delight as much as in all riches. I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways. I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word.” (Psalm 119:14–16, ESV)

“Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law. I am a sojourner on the earth; hide not your commandments from me!” (Psalm 119:18–19, ESV)

“Your testimonies are my delight; they are my counselors.” (Psalm 119:24, ESV)

“My soul melts away for sorrow; strengthen me according to your word! Put false ways far from me and graciously teach me your law!” (Psalm 119:28–29, ESV)

“Turn my eyes from looking at worthless things; and give me life in your ways.” (Psalm 119:37, ESV)

“This is my comfort in my affliction, that your promise gives me life.” (Psalm 119:50, ESV)

“Teach me good judgment and knowledge, for I believe in your commandments.” (Psalm 119:66, ESV)

“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” (Psalm 119:105, ESV)

“Your testimonies are wonderful; therefore my soul keeps them. The unfolding of your words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple. I open my mouth and pant, because I long for your commandments.” (Psalm 119:129–131, ESV)

“Your promise is well tried, and your servant loves it.” (Psalm 119:140, ESV)

“Salvation is far from the wicked, for they do not seek your statutes.” (Psalm 119:155, ESV)

“The sum of your word is truth, and every one of your righteous rules endures forever.” (Psalm 119:160, ESV)

“Great peace have those who love your law; nothing can make them stumble.” (Psalm 119:165, ESV)

“Let my cry come before you, O LORD; give me understanding according to your word! Let my plea come before you; deliver me according to your word. My lips will pour forth praise, for you teach me your statutes. My tongue will sing of your word, for all your commandments are right. Let your hand be ready to help me, for I have chosen your precepts. I long for your salvation, O LORD, and your law is my delight. Let my soul live and praise you, and let your rules help me. I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek your servant, for I do not forget your commandments.” (Psalm 119:169–176, ESV)

Now that is an immensely rich and fruitful life and it comes from the quieting of our souls before the Lord, meditating on the Word, praying the Scriptures, hiding His Word in our

hearts, slowing down in and engaging in deliberate prolonged contemplation of God's truth and it is absolutely transforming. The question we must ask and answer is, "Is it worth it?" I think you know the answer to that.

An Answer to the Questions What about the original questions that I spoke about, the questions that were raised after last week's sermon? How will the teaching in this text help? Let me speak to that for just a moment. We said that the key to growing in victory over anxiety or over any sin is to focus on and to fill our minds and hearts with the Word of God. Ok, sure, but how? We need to be disciplined and proactive in saturating our minds with the Word of God. In other words, we need to be in the practice of training our minds and our hearts during "non-crisis" times. To only wait until we are tempted to anxiety, or irrational anger, or lust, or whatever is not a winning strategy any more than running a couple of miles before entering a marathon is a winning approach.

We, all of us, need to be reading the whole counsel of God for depth and not merely breadth. Sometimes we make it our goal to read the whole Bible in a year – I'm not saying that's a bad thing – but if none of it sticks, it hasn't done us much good. Read for breadth, yes, but not at the expense of specific study of, say, a gospel or maybe the book of Ephesians or whatever. The Word needs to be read, received, meditated upon, memorized if it is going to do the work of renewing our minds.

What about specifically committing to memory verses that deal with my particular sin? Good idea, but not exclusively. It is good to have those verses committed to memory but not apart from the Scripture as a whole. Rather than focusing exclusively on Scripture that deals with anxiety, lust, anger, lying, etc. – focus on the whole counsel of Word of God and the truth of God and it will deal with issues and areas in your heart and mind – the sources of those sins -- that you never would have known were there.

Sometimes we try to track down all the roots and tendrils of why you do this or why you do that, why you feel this way or that way, and it can be an endless maze of frustration. You don't know your own fallen heart... I don't know mine. ***"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?" (Jeremiah 17:9, ESV)*** Scripture never tells us to do that. It does tell us to renew our minds, to steep ourselves in the Word of God,

to think and meditate on the truth of God, on the character of Christ, on the revelation of God in Scripture, to meditate on **whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable**. In that way, our entire thinking is renewed. The areas of our hearts and minds that need to be renewed by God's truth are, as God applies just what we need where we need it. And as you do this, Scripture will speak to your whole condition. And you will see the incidences of besetting sins decreasing in your life as your thinking and your mind is renewed. You will see a decline of besetting sins.

Let me give you an illustration from my own life, ok? Most of you know, and for those of you that don't, when I married Gretch, I was a pretty messed up guy. It caused some very real issues in our marriage for the first couple of years. I was a very angry and self-protective man, emotionally closed off and my tendency was toward withdrawal and isolationism. I cannot tell you all the ways that my thinking was flawed and my emotions were messed up, but they were. For a while I tried to figure out why. There were factors I could point to, of course, but trying to figure out why I was the way I was, was not very freeing at all. But, here's what was. As I earnestly prayed and read the Scriptures, as I earnestly sought to know Christ, to know God and His ways, as I devoted myself to really knowing the Lord in His Word, as I sought to meditate on **whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable**, in ways that I do not even now fully know, my emotions and my mind, my desires and my actions, were renewed by God's grace. Not that I do not still have to fight some of those same sins that I once did, but they no longer have the grip on me that they once did. I say all of that to say that ultimately our hope is in Christ and in His transforming grace through the power of His Word applied to our hearts and the peace that His presence brings and not in our own self-analysis or effort. Our hope is in Christ and in His truly shaping and molding our hearts, our beliefs and our actions. In that we find real and lasting peace. Paul closes this section with that very promise, the presence of the God of peace.

The Promise (9) I'll just read this to close; it doesn't need really any exposition for you to understand the gist of it. Paul says, **"What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you."** (Philippians 4:9, ESV)

You have heard me teach and what you have seen me do – practicing gospel integrity in relationships; rejoicing in the Lord in all circumstances; being reasonable – pursuing gentleness, meekness, graciousness, a sober evaluation of self, forbearance, and selflessness; refusing to be anxious but praying with thankfulness, and saturating my mind with the truth of God – you do these things and you will have what you most wish for. The God of peace will be with you and you will not merely survive, you will thrive and stand firm in Christ.

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