

Spiritual Stability, Part 5: Godly Thinking

Scripture: Philippians 4:8

Code: 50-41

Let's open our Bibles to the text of our message this morning, Philippians chapter 4, returning to the passage verses 1 through 9. Philippians chapter 4 verses 1 through 9 and our subject is spiritual stability. When the apostle Paul wrote to the church at Corinth, "Be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord," he was calling for spiritual stability. When James wrote that a double-minded man is unstable in all his ways, that, too, was a call for spiritual stability. When Peter wrote that God desired to perfect, confirm, strengthen, and establish you, that also, as the result of casting all your care on Him, was a call to spiritual stability, and when the apostle John said that he had no greater joy than to hear that his children walked in the truth, he spoke of spiritual stability.

Those are a few samples to indicate to us how significant a theme the theme of spiritual stability is throughout the New Testament. Over and over again, we, as Christians, are called upon to be faithful, to be consistent, to be stable, to be strong, to be bold, to be courageous, to be unwavering, to be uncompromising as the children of God, and this really gets right at the very heart of Christian living. The call of God upon us is that we should be stable, firm, strong, and, of course, that against the onslaught and the attack of the world, the flesh and the devil, therein lies the spiritual battle. Persecution, hostility, rejection, testings, trials, temptations – all of these kinds of things come at us to topple us, to make us unstable, and the call of the New Testament is for us to be stable.

Now, we're learning about how to be stable. It's one thing to be called to spiritual stability; it's quite another thing to understand what that call involves, and so as we look at Philippians chapter 4 and these first nine verses, we are given here a pattern of truth that produces spiritual stability. Obviously, all of us who know and love the Lord Jesus Christ would affirm that we want to be stable. No one likes being defeated, no one likes being a loser, no one likes being beaten down, no one likes being depressed, no one likes falling under temptation and therefore into sin, no one likes persecution, no one really enjoys going through a test and failing it. The assumption, then, is that there is a desire within us to experience the full expression of our identity as an overcomer.

We want to be a winner. We want to triumph spiritually. We want to be the victor. We longingly look at someone like Paul and wonder if he's even human because he seems to experience so much spiritual victory in the middle of so much spiritual warfare. But the question that comes back to us is, even though we want this and even though we understand that this is a biblical issue, how can we be stable? How can we hold our ground? How can we not become the loser and remain the winner? How can we not be defeated and triumph? How can we not be depressed and be joyous? How can

we ride across the top of all of the waves, as it were, that come against us?

Well, I believe Paul gives us the answer to that very, very important question right here in this wonderful passage. The key phrase I draw you to is in verse 1. We've noted it each time, and this is message number five in the series. The key phrase is this exhortation or command: Stand firm in the Lord. That is a command and that is the bottom line here in the text, Stand firm in the Lord. Stand against doubt. Stand against temptation. Stand against trials and tests. Stand against persecution. But notice also the little word "so" or "thusly" or "in this way," and Paul is saying, "Now I'm going to tell you how. Here is how to stand firm," and then he proceeds to give a number of disciplines, principles by which we, as believers, can enjoy spiritual stability.

Now, do you remember principle number one? Spiritual stability requires cultivating peace in the fellowship. We looked at verse 1, we saw Paul's expression of love. We looked at verses 2 and 3 and saw how deeply he desired the unity of the church and he wanted those two opposing women to get together and he wanted the church to help them in the process. Why? Because individual spiritual stability is the result of corporate harmony, corporate peace. Where there is peace in the church and harmony in the church, the church is stabilized individually. On the other hand, where there is discord, conflict in the church, it breeds insecurity. So the first virtue that is necessary for spiritual stability is peace. Peace.

The second is in verse 4. Not only does spiritual stability mandate cultivating peace in the fellowship, but secondly maintaining a spirit of joy; maintaining a spirit of joy. "Rejoice in the Lord always," he says, "and I will say again, rejoice." The rejoicing, you will please note, is in the Lord. If you attach your rejoicing to your circumstances, it will come and go. If you attach your rejoicing to the Lord, it will always remain the same because He never changes nor does His relationship to you ever change. So you learn to rejoice in the privileged union you have with Christ, which transcends circumstances. So the second virtue, then, necessary for spiritual stability is a surpassing, overruling joy that is not subject to difficulty.

Third. The third principle we noted was that spiritual stability comes to those who learn to accept less than they deserve. Learning to accept less than you deserve. Verse 5: "Let your forbearing be known to all men." What he means by that word "forbearing" is really your willingness to accept less than you deserve. He's talking here about the spiritual virtue of humility. You can call it forbearing, you can call it contentment, you can call it humble graciousness. It is the attitude of a person who seeks nothing so that when he gets nothing, he's not concerned with that. Humility.

The fourth principle also in verse 5 and then on to verse 6 is this: Spiritual stability requires resting on a confident trust in the Lord – resting on a confident trust in the Lord. He says in verse 5, the Lord is near; then verse 6, so be anxious for nothing. What are you going to worry about when the Lord is there? If you understand who God is and if you believe Him and you believe in Him, then what are

you going to worry about? He transcends every problem. He transcends every difficulty, every test, every trial, every temptation. So the bottom line here is how much do you know about God and how much do you trust God? If you trust God, you will transcend your difficulty because you will understand who God is, you will understand the purposes of God, you will understand that God is still in control, and you will therefore be calm in the midst of your storm. Let's call this the virtue of faith. These are the virtues that make for spiritual stability – peace, joy, humility, and faith. You trust God and you know He's in charge.

The fifth principle, and the one at which point we stopped last time is this: Spiritual stability requires reacting to problems with thankful prayer. In verse 6, you remember, Paul said instead of worrying about things, pray – but, he said, pray with thanksgiving – pray with a thankful heart. So let's say the fifth virtue is gratitude – gratitude. You show me a person who has peace, the peace that the Spirit of God produces, joy, a person who is humble, you show me a person who believes truly in God and you show me a person who is thankful in everything and I'll show you a person who is spiritually stable. Those are the virtues.

Just a footnote from last time on this note in verse 6 about praying with thanksgiving, no matter how difficult the problem. If you rightly understand what you're going through, you should be thankful. No matter what persecution, no matter what trial, no matter what temptation comes your way, first of all, you can be thankful that in it there is the purpose of God. Right? God is accomplishing some purpose. All things are working together for good according to His purpose. In it also there is the perfecting work of God. Through every difficulty He conforms you more and more to be strong and to be like His Son. In it also there is the provision of God, for it allows Him in difficulty to manifest His care for you. In it there is the promise of God that the God who takes you through and cares for you now is the God in whom you hope for a future deliverance which will lead you into His very eternal presence.

So in the middle of your trial, you can be thankful for the purpose of God being worked by that trial. You can be thankful for the perfection of God being worked and accomplished in your life. You can be thankful for the provision and care of God in the process. And you can be thankful that it's only a taste to assure you of the future promise of God to be revealed in the day of Jesus Christ. You need to learn to be thankful, and if you really know who your God is and you really understand who your God is and you really know that He's working out His perfect plan, you can have a thankful heart in any difficulty at all. You don't need to lose your stability.

Let me give you perhaps the most interesting illustration of this. Do you remember a man named Jonah? Jonah had a predicament that is unimaginable, absolutely unimaginable. Somebody sent me a little sign this week. It's been a very difficult week or so for me, a lot of battles, and somebody knew I was kind of struggling with a lot of things that were going on. They sent me a picture of two penguins. They were standing like this, facing forward and one of them was consumed down to the middle by a huge fish and the other one was saying, "Remember God is in control." That's easy for

you to say – and I couldn't help but think of Jonah. That was exactly his predicament.

As you come to Jonah chapter 2, it simply says, "Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the stomach of the fish." Now, if you were in the stomach of a fish, what would your prayer be like? Maybe not a lot like Jonah's, maybe a lot of screaming and crying out and pleading and "What are You doing, God? Where are You? Where have You gone? Why is this happening?" That was not Jonah's approach. Listen to this, Jonah in the first place must have had his senses about him as he was floating around in the gastric juices because this is what he said, verse 2 chapter 2, "I called out of my distress to the Lord and He answered me. I cried for help from the depths of Sheol, Thou didst hear my voice for Thou hast cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas and the current engulfed me, all Thy breakers and billows passed over me." I mean he pictures himself sinking into the sea. "So I said, I have been expelled from Thy sight, nevertheless I will look again toward Thy holy temple." In other words, he says I'm so far down here, God doesn't know where I am. He can't find me. "I will look again toward Thy holy temple, water compassed me to the point of death. The great deep engulfed me. Weeds were wrapped around my head. I descended to the roots of the mountains. The earth with its bars was around me forever. But Thou hast brought up my life from the pit, O Lord my God. While I was fainting away, I remembered the Lord, and my prayer came to Thee into Thy holy temple. Those who regard vain idols forsake their faithfulness, but I will sacrifice to Thee with the voice of thanksgiving."

He says, "I will sacrifice to Thee with the voice of thanksgiving." If there's one thing a fish can't stand, it's a thankful prophet. It made him sick and he vomited Jonah out in verse 10. Here was a man who was in the direst imaginable circumstance, an unthinkable trauma who in the midst of it all expressed his great prayer of thanksgiving. Now, that, in spite of Jonah's other weaknesses reflects a great amount of spiritual stability. And then he says, "Salvation is from the Lord." There never was a wavering in his confidence of God's ability to deliver, should He choose to do so.

Now, back to Philippians chapter 4 where Paul says if you pray like that, if you manifest that kind of thanksgiving because you have that strong faith, you will find – verse 7 – the peace of God will guard you from being unstable. The peace of God will bring a tranquility and a contentment and a consolation beyond human device, beyond human explanation, beyond human understanding. He says it really surpasses all comprehension, and it'll guard you from instability. We call this the virtue of gratitude, a grateful heart.

You see, spiritual stability is experienced through these means – peace, joy, humility, faith, and gratitude, and when your life is characterized by those spiritual attitudes, you will be able to experience difficulty and not lose your balance and not get knocked over and toppled. But Paul is not through. He now reaches, I believe, the climax and another essential key to being spiritually stable and, really, the key to everything in verse 8.

This is the major point that he wants to make, the high point. In order to be spiritually stable, and frankly, in order to experience peace, joy, humility, faith, and gratitude, you must be focusing on godly virtues. You must be focusing on godly virtues. You cannot experience godly virtues unless you focus on godly virtues. Verse 8 says: “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, let your mind dwell on these things.”

Now, here the apostle Paul sums up what he’s been saying. The word “finally” indicates that he has reached a climax at this particular point, and this is the great – in a sense, the great summation of everything, the great key to all the other elements, and what he is saying, basically, is summed up in that last phrase of verse 8, “Let your mind dwell on these things.” Spiritual stability is a result of how you think – of how you think. Now, modern psychology today, which has a corner on – supposedly on helping people, says that if you want to be stable, if you want to get your act together, if you want to be delivered from your schizophrenia, from your various neuroses and psychoses, if you want to be a calm, comfortable, stable person who’s got it together, one of the things you need to do is look into your past.

You need to sort of get out the dredge and dredge up the scum of the past, you need to dive into the trash bin of your past, you need to find your old sins and your old hurts and the abuses and mistreatments and all of the chaos of your past, the garbage of your life, the old sins and failures, and you need to poke around, stir it up, deal with all of it, regurgitate it all, et cetera, et cetera. They may even go to the extreme where if you happen to go to a psychiatrist who develops primal therapy techniques, he’ll stick you on the floor, stuff pillows around you, put you in a fetal position, and try to get you to feel the pain of your prebirth experience in the womb of your mother, and that is the start of the path to stability.

This, of course, has spilled over into Christianity as well. However, in the light of verse 8 it seems to me to be utterly obtuse and ridiculous for what the apostle Paul here says is clearly this, that you are to focus your attention completely on things that are true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, and of good repute. The focus of the Christian is away from those things of which it is a shame to speak for they are the things of the darkness, as Paul calls them in Ephesians chapter 5.

So Paul wants to sum up and what his final and summing point is – is that you must, if you want to be spiritually stable, learn how to think on the right things. As I said, the key phrase – let’s look at it now – is in verse 8: “Let your mind dwell on these things.” This is a call for right thinking. The verb is *logizesthe*. It’s an imperative which means it’s a command. It means not just to think in the simple one-dimensional sense, it means to evaluate, it means to ascertain, it means to use your faculties to consider the validity and implications of these things. In other words, to develop these kind of thinking habits.

Now, I want you to listen carefully to what I say. This seems obvious. You, as a believer, are a product of your thinking because it says in the Bible as clearly as possible, “As a man thinks in his heart, so” – what? – “is he.” You are the product of your thoughts. The computers, people say, G.I.G.O., garbage in, garbage out. Whatever you program is exactly what you’re going to get. You are the product of your thinking. Now, what is particularly frightening about that in our culture is that it seems to me that thinking is not really that important today. We are not so concerned about thinking as we are about two other things. Let’s call them emotion and pragmatism.

We are concerned about feeling and we are concerned about success; we are not so concerned about thinking. In other words, people don’t ask this question: Is it true? And they don’t ask the question: Is it right? They ask these questions: Does it work? and How will it make me feel? That’s what they want to know. They don’t want to know is it right, they don’t really care if it’s right. They don’t particularly care if it’s true, but will it work and will it make me feel good? That’s a tragic thing to face, but that is in fact the nature of our society. The mind is depreciated in our culture because we are into a feeling kind of culture. Even in theology, it is sad to say that the issue is not always is it right or is it true but will it divide or will it offend? Those are new things for us to deal with.

You see, the noble Bereans were noble because they searched the Scriptures not to see if these things felt good and not to see if these things worked and not to see if these things would not offend, but to see if these things were so. Now, we live in a culture that is fast learning not to think because it is fast learning not to read, which creates thinking.

Paul Robinson, a professor at Stanford University, was a contributor to the latest edition of The Little Brown Reader, which comes out and is for those people in the English and communications field. I was sent a copy of the article he wrote entitled, “TV Can’t Educate.” It’s quite a fascinating article. He, simply coming from a secular mind analyzing our society and the mode of communication that is effective in the thinking process, simply says this: “The only way to learn is by reading.” It’s the only way to learn because words on a page freeze a thought, you can analyze it, you can synthesize it, you can verify it, you can meditate on it. Pictures don’t create thought; they just grab emotions.

He goes on to point out the fact that the worst possible TV is educational TV because it is a contradiction in terms since TV can’t educate. He said, “You would be better off never to have educational TV because at least in your mind there would be a vacuum that someday might be filled with a real thought.” We have a society that doesn’t think. We’re not into is it true, is it right, we’re into how does it make me feel and does it work.

Bill Hull, in a book entitled Right Thinking written in 1985, writes, “What scares me is the anti-intellectual, anti-critical thinking philosophy that has spilled over into the church. This philosophy tends to romanticize the faith, making the local church into an experience center. Their concept of

church is that they are spiritual consumers and that the church's job is to meet their felt needs," end quote. And what is happening in the church is that people are going to church not to think, not to reason about the truth, not like the noble Bereans to search the Scriptures to see what is true, but they're going there to get a weekly spiritual fix, a weekly spiritual high, so they can feel that God is still with them. They are spiritually unstable because they live on feeling rather than on thinking.

The Christian must not be a victim of his feelings. He must not get caught in a pragmatic trap of does-it-work/is-it-successful. John Stott has written in his helpful little book, *Your Mind Matters*, this: "Indeed, sin has more dangerous effects on our faculty of feeling than on our faculty of thinking because our opinions are more easily checked and regulated by revealed truth than are experiences," end quote. Very wise statement.

In searching a little bit deeper into this subject this week, I took a book of my shelf entitled *Stations of the Mind*, written by William Glasser, an M.D. psychiatrist who is basically the father of reality therapy, the innovator of a kind of psychiatric therapy called reality therapy. He has an entire section in that book on the brain and how it works. Coming from a secular, psychiatric mindset, it's quite curious what his research has led him to conclude. He shows, for example, that humans are not simply what they call S-R animals. S-R means stimulus-response. You see, traditional, pagan, humanistic psychiatry/psychology simply sees man at the end of an evolutionary process. We are simply the pinnacle of evolution, we're along the lines of all other animals. In fact, if you go back earlier than that, we're not much different than a rock or a leaf or whatever. We're just at the end of the evolutionary chain, out there on the top of this thing, but we have the same characteristics as those other elements along that evolutionary chain; therefore, we are a stimulus-response kind of animal.

And that is why, for example, you have a man like Pavlov who gets a bunch of dogs and runs a bunch of tests with dogs and whenever there's a certain situation to stimulate them, they start to salivate, and you take Pavlov's dogs and you translate it over into human behavior because all we are is fancy dogs, that's all. So whatever made Pavlov's dogs salivate should be conclusive about human behavior. So you come up with the conclusion that we are S-Rs, we are stimulus-response people. When the stimulus is there, we respond, and given the same stimulus, we have a predictable response.

This has been pretty much unassailable truth in the evolutionary mindset. Glasser attacks it, interestingly enough, and says frankly that man is not controlled by a predictable stimulus-response factor. Man is controlled from the inside, he says, by what he wants and by what he desires, and he says what he wants and what he desires is predetermined by what has influenced his what? His thinking – his thinking. He says you can give one man the same kind of stimulus several times through his life, and you might get several different responses. If it were a factor in human design that he always responded in an S-R fashion, then his response would always have to be the same to the same stimulus, but it isn't.

Furthermore, you can take 15 people, give them all the same stimulus and get 15 different responses because man responds not by the outside stimulus but by what he wants and what he desires, he says, which is programmed by what has influenced his thinking. His response is not mechanical, says Glasser, it is thoughtful. That's very important. It is thoughtful. The mind then becomes the command center which determines his conduct based upon how he thinks, based upon how he's been influenced to think. So how one thinks is the critical issue. You're not just a fancy dog, you're not going to salivate every time the same deal happens. You're going to react according to how you think. The mind, then, has the power to shape you and to shape your action and consequently is the most powerful element of human life.

Lord Palmerston said in the House of Commons in July 21, 1849, quote: "Opinions are stronger than armies, opinions will in the end prevail against the bayonets of infantry, the fire of artillery, and the charges of cavalry," end quote. He's right. Armies come and go; ideologies last. It's amazing how powerful opinions are.

Now, from the biblical perspective, it becomes very clear how important thinking is, and that is precisely what Paul is calling for in this verse. He is saying you've got to learn how to think on the right things. Let's talk a little bit about what the Bible says about thinking. What a very basic issue this is.

First of all, God has commanded us to think. Do you remember Isaiah 1:18? You remember what God said? He said, "Come now, let us" – what? – "reason together." Let's think this thing through. He didn't say, "Come, let us feel one another." He didn't say, "Come, let us experience this together." He said, "Come, let's reason. Let's think this through." In Matthew chapter 16, the Pharisees and the Sadducees came to Jesus, they said, "We want to see a sign. We want You to show us a sign. Do something spectacular that will overwhelm us." And He said, "Well," He said, "you can look at the sky and tell what the weather's like, why can't you look at the revelation of God and figure it out?" In other words, "I'm not going to give you some spectacular show in the sky, I'm going to ask you to consider what the facts are that you already have access to."

Jesus furthermore said, "Even though someone is raised from the dead, they won't believe if they didn't believe Moses and the prophets." Always, the Bible calls on men to think, to reason. You see, that's why the Bible is a book. When God gave us His revelation, He did not give us a movie. He did not. He did not give us a series of music videos. You know what? He didn't even have built-in organ background when you read the Bible. Nobody is humming. There's nothing to touch your emotions except the contemplation of truth. No stimulus other than truth, which requires thought. So Scriptures assume that the first priority is to think because it's a book. Don't you see how different this is from the modern-day sort of Charismatic movement where everyone is running around, not looking for truth but looking for what? Experience, emotion, feeling. The Bible is, by its very nature, calling men

to think.

Psalm 32 verse 9 – verse 8 actually, “I will instruct you,” says God, “I will teach you in the way which you should go, I will counsel you with My eye upon you.” In other words, “I’ll give you all the truth, all the instruction, all the teaching, all the counseling.” Verse 9: “Do not be as the horse or as the mule which have no understanding.” Think. Don’t be like a horse or a mule; think and you’ll have access to My truth. Psalm 73:22, the Psalmist admits, “I was senseless and ignorant, I was like a beast.” Don’t be like that. Think. Listen now, careful thinking is the distinctive of our revealed faith. Let me say that again. Careful thinking is the distinctive of our revealed faith.

Orr wrote a book called *The Christian View of God and the World*. In one paragraph, he says this very insightfully: “If there is a religion in the world which exalts the office of teaching, it is safe to say that it is the religion of Jesus Christ. It has been frequently remarked that in pagan religions, the doctrinal element is at a minimum. The chief thing there is the performance of a ritual. But this is precisely where Christianity distinguishes itself from other religions – it does contain doctrine. It comes to men with definite, positive teaching. It claims to be the truth. It bases religion on knowledge, though a knowledge which is only obtainable under moral conditions. A religion divorced from earnest and lofty thought has always, down through the whole history of the church, tended to become weak, jejune, and unwholesome while the intellect deprived of its rights within religion has sought its satisfaction without and developed into godless rationalism,” end quote. Boy, that is a great statement.

To sum up what he says, if there’s any religion in the world that exalts the office of teaching and, therefore, the idea of thinking, it is the Christian religion because it is propositional, it is written. It is not a ritual. It is not an experience. It is a revelation of truth. And then he says, “When the church ceases to think and reason and divorces itself from lofty thought, then,” he says, “the mind or the intellect, deprived of its rights in religion, will pursue something outside of religion to fulfill itself and thus comes the rise of godless rationalism.” So maybe the church contributes to rationalism because it offers nothing to the mind when it is weak and witless as it so often is.

Now, when you come to considering this matter of the mind, the Bible has a lot to say, has a lot to say about thinking. Let me give you a little theology of thinking – coming quick so hold on. What about before you’re saved, what does it say about your mind? Here it comes. First of all, your mind is depraved, Romans 1:28. It’s depraved, debased, debauched, wicked, evil, that’s what that means. Secondly, it’s blind, 2 Corinthians 4:4. Thirdly, it is futile, vain, worthless, useless, Ephesians 4:17. Fourthly, it is ignorant, Ephesians 4:18. Finally, it is foolish, 1 Corinthians 2:14.

So you can say to an unbeliever, “My friend, I don’t know you real well, but I do know a few things about you I’d like to share. I don’t know what your IQ is, I don’t know what your academic background is, but I want to tell you that your mind is depraved, blind, futile, ignorant, and foolish.” And you know, you’d be exactly right – exactly right. So depraved it does not choose what is good, so blind it does

not know what is good, so useless it does not perform what is good, so ignorant it doesn't even know it's doing all of this, and you're left with the only alternative: everything is foolish. That's the mind of man, fallen man.

The gospel, then, penetrates, right? Now, what about the mind at salvation? Is the gospel concerned about the mind? You better believe it. Do you remember what we've been studying in 1 Peter 3 where Peter says you must be able to give to every man who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you? You have to be able to show him a reason for this. Why do you believe this? In Matthew chapter 13, Jesus said, "Sometimes the seed falls" – verse 19 – "on the ground and the seed is the Word of the kingdom and the hard ground is the heart that does not understand it and Satan snatches it away." It demands reason and it demands understanding.

An element of salvation, an element of it, is occurring within the mind as a person is coming to a proper comprehension of truth, truth about himself, truth about his sin, truth about God, truth about Christ, truth about the work of Christ, truth about the future. That all comes into the mind. That's why it says in Romans 10 that faith comes by hearing a speech about Christ. It's not some esoteric thing; faith comes through the mind, through the reason. "Come now, let us reason together," says Isaiah, "though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as wool, though they be red like crimson, they shall become as white as snow." Let's reason that. The gospel hits the mind. That's what made those Bereans so noble, they searched the Scripture, they thought it through.

J. Gresham Machen, that great student of Scripture in his book, *The Christian Faith in the Modern World*, said, "What the Holy Spirit does in the new birth is not to make a man a Christian regardless of the evidence, but on the contrary, to clear away the mists from his eyes and enable him to attend to the evidence." That's the point. He sees it. He understands it by the working of the Spirit of God. Well, this we know because men are saved to be worshipers, right? John 4, the Father seeks true worshipers, and a true worshiper worships in spirit and in what? Truth. So if we're saved to worship in truth, then truth is crucial. Salvation is God's work on the mind.

You see, it is unacceptable to worship God apart from the truth about God. That's why Paul was so upset when he got to Mars Hill in Acts 17 and he found a bunch of erudite Greek philosophers who built an altar to what god? The unknown god – how absolutely ridiculous. That does not please God. God isn't saying, "Well, it's a nice gesture and I really understand the spirit of it and I accept it." Not on your life. God is not the unknown God, God will be worshiped only according to the truth of who He is, and so Paul immediately informed them of who God really was.

And in Luke 10:27, it says you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind. You see, salvation is an intelligent response to God's self-revelation in Scripture prompted by the Holy Spirit. True faith is not an irrational leap, true faith is not some contact with the ground of being, as Paul Tillich used to say. True faith is not some explosion into a non-quantifiable event. True

faith is not some mysterious, irreproducible, unspeakable encounter. True faith is a reasonable trust in the revealed truth about the true God. It is a process of thinking. Salvation is impossible without thinking.

When Jesus was talking to His disciples in Matthew 6, He – well, all the time when He was talking to them, He wanted to get them to think, but in Matthew 6, you know, they were bemoaning the fact that they might not have food and clothing, and you remember He came to them and He basically says the birds of the air, they're taken care of, and you see how the lilies of the field are and the grass of the field and all of that, and O, you of little faith, why don't you just believe God to take care of you. Remember that in Matthew 6?

Martyn Lloyd-Jones, in his classic *The Sermon on the Mount*, writes this little paragraph on that section – I think it's worthy of repeating. He says, "Faith, according to our Lord's teaching in this paragraph, is primarily thinking, and the whole trouble with a man of little faith is that he doesn't think. He allows circumstances to bludgeon him. We must spend more time in studying our Lord's lessons in observation and deduction. The Bible," he says, "is full of logic, and we must never think of faith as something purely mystical. We do not just sit down in an armchair and expect marvelous things to happen to us. This is not Christian faith. 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. Faith, if you like, can be defined like this: It is a man insisting upon thinking when everything seems determined to bludgeon and knock him down in an intellectual sense. The trouble with the person of little faith is that instead of controlling his own thought, his thought is being controlled by something else, and as we put it, he goes round and round in circles. That is the essence of worry." Now, get this: "That is not thought, that is the absence of thought," end quote. Great.

What does he mean by that? He means if you worry, it's because you're not thinking; you're being bludgeoned by your circumstances. If you rise above them and think about your God and think about His purposes and think about His promises and think about His plans, you won't worry. Right? Remember that when you worry. That's – people say, "You worry. You think too much." No, you think too little. You think far too little in the right direction. Faith is not optimism. Faith is not psychological self-hypnosis. Faith is not wishful thinking. Faith is a reasoned response to revealed truth.

Now, we talked about what your mind was like before salvation. We talked about how God moves your mind at salvation. What about after salvation? Well, your mind's been transformed, you've got a new mind. You don't have a new brain but you have a new mind. That is, you've been infused with a new divine capacity to reason. The Spirit of God has invaded your thought processes. Unbelievable, isn't it? You don't just think as a human brain anymore; you think as a human brain mingled with the Spirit of the living God who lives within you. You have all new thought patterns.

To show you this, look at Romans chapter 8. Romans chapter 8 and verse 5. This draws it as simply and clearly as any passage. Verse 5 of Romans 8 says, “For those who are according to the flesh” – that’s unregenerate people, non-Christian people – “those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh.” To put it simply, unsaved people have an unsaved mindset. Fleshly people have a fleshly mindset. They think about fleshly things. But – verse 5 – “Those who are according to the Spirit” – the regenerate – “set their mind on the things of the Spirit.” You have a new mind. Verse 6: “For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace.”

You have a whole new mind. It’s not set on the flesh, it’s set on the Spirit. It’s incredible. The word here, *phronoma*, means mindset, a whole new way of thinking is what it means. Not a new brain but a new way of thinking. All of a sudden, your thought patterns which are physical and human are injected with thought patterns which are divine and supernatural. The Spirit of God moves into your thinking, and now that mind which was once depraved and blind and futile and ignorant and foolish is totally different. It no longer thinks on the fleshly level, it thinks on the spiritual level.

Look at 1 Corinthians chapter 1 verse 30. When we think about what Christ gives us in salvation, what He brings to us, what He provides for us, what He grants us, it’s absolutely thrilling, but just note this – maybe you overlooked this one. First Corinthians 1:30, “By God’s doing we are in Christ,” he says, we have become in Christ. Then it says, “Christ Jesus who became to us” – what? – “wisdom from God.” Isn’t that a marvelous reality? All of a sudden, now we have the wisdom of God, and the Old Testament psalmist says – Psalm 92:5 – “Thy thoughts are very deep.” Now all of a sudden, we can plunge the deep thoughts of eternal God. We think in ways we never thought before. We think God’s thoughts.

Go to chapter 2. Chapter 2 verse 11: “For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so, the thoughts of God no one knows 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 know the things freely given to us by God.” Unbelievable. The only one who knows a man is the spirit of that man. That’s analogous to the fact that the only one who knows God is the Spirit of God, and we have received the Spirit of God; therefore, we have the knowledge of God. So we have the wisdom of Christ, we have the knowledge of God granted us by the Holy Spirit.

Look at verse 15. “He who is spiritual appraises all things.” Great statement. “Yet He Himself is appraised by no man for who has known the mind of the Lord that he should instruct him? But we have” – what? – “the mind of Christ.” Isn’t that incredible? We’re not like the natural man in verse 14 who doesn’t know anything about God, it’s all foolishness to him. We know the mind of Christ, we now understand the wisdom of God, the Spirit of God brings us knowledge about God that we would otherwise never, ever have. And you know as a Christian you have that? You know, now, Paul wrote to these Corinthians. You remember this group wasn’t really that great. They had a lot of major problems. They still had the mind of Christ, they still had the wisdom of God, they still had the

teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit.

In fact – chapter 10 – after he’s just blasted them for a number of chapters on their sinfulness, in chapter 10, he’s going to talk to them about how they have desecrated the Lord’s table – to add to all the other terrible things they did, they were desecrating the Lord’s table – but look what he says to them in chapter 10 verse 15: “I’m speaking as to wise men; you judge what I say.” “What do you mean by that, Paul?” “I mean, look, what I’m telling you, by God’s grace and through salvation, you have the divine wisdom to evaluate. You can understand this. You can apply this.” That’s how we are to think, consistent with the wisdom of God granted us in Christ.

It says in Colossians 3:10 that the new self is renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him. In other words, we’ve been given a new mind; therefore, 2 Corinthians 10:3 says the weapons of our warfare are not what? Fleshly. The weapons of our warfare are not fleshly, they are spiritual weapons. They are weapons, it says, that destroy speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ. Isn’t it amazing? We can go through the world and literally take every human thought captive to the truth in Christ, can’t we? We can force it to submit to what we know is true about Christ, true about God, true about Scripture. We have a new mind. You ever strained anything through a strainer? We have the ability to strain all the data in the world and purify it. We have the mind of Christ, the mind of God.

So the Christian life, then, becomes characterized by a new mind. We have a new mind. But may I challenge you? Have you noticed that sometimes your mind gets dirty? Have you noticed it needs a periodic cleaning? Well, in Romans 12:1-2, it says that we not only are to present our bodies, a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is an act of reasonable worship, but we are not to be conformed to this world but to be transformed by the renewing of your mind in order that you may know what is the good and acceptable and perfect Will of God. We are continually in need of renewing our minds – continually renewing our minds. In Ephesians 4:23, Paul says, “Be renewed in the spirit of your mind.” In 1 Thessalonians at the end, chapter 5 verse 21: “Examine everything carefully, hold fast to what is good, learn to think, refresh your mind, clean your mind, renew your mind.” Gets dirty in the world.

Peter says in 1 Peter 1:13: “Gird up your mind for action.” Got to take care of your mind, folks, that’s what he’s saying. That’s what Paul’s saying, Peter’s saying – take care of your mind. John Owen, a great Puritan writer, said this: “That good which the mind cannot discover, the will cannot choose, and the affections cannot cleave to.” And then Owen said, “In Scripture, the deceit of the mind is commonly laid down as the principle of all sin.” You must take care of your mind. We are, therefore, called to mental discipline. Colossians 3:2: “Set your mind on things” – what? – “above, not on things on the earth.” Paul often says in his epistles, “I would not have you to be” – what? – “ignorant.” Ten times in 1 Corinthians and Romans he says, “Do you not know?” “Do you not know?” “Do you not

know?” He’s always filling in the gaps of their lack of knowledge and Jesus often used the verb “to think.” We must be committed to thinking and thinking on the right things.

This isn’t really new to the New Testament. If you go all the way back to the instruction of Proverbs chapter 2, it says, “My son, if you will receive My sayings and treasure My commandments within you, make your ear attentive to wisdom, incline your heart to understanding, for if you cry for discernment, lift your voice for understanding; if you seek her as silver and search for her as for hidden treasures, then you will discern the fear of the Lord and discover the knowledge of God for the Lord gives wisdom, from His mouth comes knowledge and understanding.” In other words, you’ve got to go after it. You’ve got to mine it like you were mining silver. You’ve got to work to get it.

And by the way, if you’re faithful to make the maximum effort according to Psalm 119:34, God will give you understanding. The Christian mind tragically has succumbed to the secular drift and we have a Christianity today that doesn’t think. It’s somewhat hysterical, melancholy, melodramatic – it doesn’t think. It’s really tragic. We’re asking the wrong questions. We’re asking, “How will it make me feel?” and “Does it work?” instead of “Is it true?” “Is it right?” We’ve got to learn to think on the right things.

Now, what are they? Let’s look at our text. Very simple. I don’t even need to comment on them, actually, you can see them for yourself. First he says, “Finally, brethren, whatever is true.” Now, if you want to know what’s true, where are you going to go? To the Word of God. John 17:17: “Thy Word is truth.” Psalm 19:9, Psalm 119:151, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. The truth is in Christ, Ephesians 4:21 tells us that. The truth is in God, 2 Timothy 2:25 tells us that. So if you want to know the truth, you go to the Word of God. It’s the focus and the locus of all truth. So if I’m going to think on whatever is true, I’m going to dwell on the Word of God first of all and on anything else that is true.

Secondly, he says, “Whatever is honorable,” that means worthy of respect. Whatever is noble, whatever is dignified, whatever is reverent, whatever is lofty, not trashy, mundane, common. The word really comes from a term meaning to worship. Whatever is worthy of awe, whatever is held in high regard, whatever is greatly respected, whatever is worthy of adoration, that’s what I think about. Thirdly, he says, “Whatever is right.” And the word is righteous here – righteous. Whatever is in perfect harmony with the eternal, unchanging, divine standard of a holy God revealed in Scripture. I am going to think on what is true. I am going to think on what is worthy of worship. I am going to think on what is absolutely consistent with the holiness of God. And then he says, “Whatever is pure,” hagnos, meaning morally clean, undefiled. Whatever is morally pure and morally clean, I will think on that, not the other junk.

Then he says, “Whatever is lovely,” that means winsome, pleasing, attractive, amiable. It’s one of those words that we only find here in the New Testament, an unusual word. It means whatever is sweet or gracious or generous or patient. It can a lot of sort of facets. Whatever is attractive and lovely is as good as any word to translate that term. And then he says, “Whatever is of good repute,”

which means well thought of. Whatever is highly regarded. That's where I put my thoughts.

You know where that keeps me? That really confines me, doesn't it? If I look at the world, am I going to find the truth? If I look around at the world, am I going to find what is honorable, what is right, what is pure, what is lovely, what is of good report? When I turn on the television, is that what I'm going to see? When I go to the theater, is that what I'm going to see? When I read a book or a magazine, is that what I'm going to see? When I have a conversation with friends, is that what I'm going to experience? The point is, you've got to protect your mind because that is what determines what you want and what you desire and that's what determines how you react to the stimuli of life.

And then he says, "If there's any excellence and anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things." And those are statements that we could just as well read "since there is excellence and since there are some things worthy of praise, please focus on them." Please. Your mind is the greatest treasure you have in terms of those gifts of human life, and now as a believer, your mind works in concert with the Spirit of God. You must protect that mind, and the way you protect it is how you think, and you must protect its influences. You must avoid those things which negatively influence your thinking. There's no – there's no quick fix to this. There's not any easy formula to spiritual stability that you can get in four counseling sessions. There's not any little book that you can write and say here it is. You can't bottle it and tell them to take a dose a day.

Spiritual stability is a product of cultivating peace in the fellowship, maintaining a spirit of joy, learning to accept less than you're due, resting on a confident trust or faith in the Lord, reacting to problems with thankful prayer and all of that flows out of focusing on godly virtues that begin to dominate your thinking patterns, and that's what produces the peace, the joy, the humility, the faith, the gratitude that make your life stabilized.

Now, the only remaining issue here – and Paul knows it – is to say, "Look, if you want an example of all this, look at me." Verse 9: "The things you've learned, received, and heard and seen in me, practice these things and the God of peace shall be with you." You'll not only have the peace of God – verse 7 – you'll have the God of peace – verse 9. Paul says, "I'll be the model." And then he goes on from there to give us illustrations of how he literally transcended his troubles, his persecutions, his difficulties, his testings, and maintains spiritual stability.

Beloved, as a man thinks in his heart, so is he. We must learn to guard our minds. You cannot expect the fullness of spiritual joy and usefulness unless you desire the right things because that's what moves your behavior, and your desires are a direct reflection of your influences. So brethren, think on these things. Let's bow together in prayer.

Father, gratefully we express appreciation for the fact that You have ministered to us this morning in many ways. You have given us the privilege of sitting, as it were, at the feet of the Spirit of God, to be

taught. Help us, Lord, to understand the unbelievable privilege of having the mind of Christ, the wisdom of God dispensed to us by the Spirit of God, so that we can properly know what is right. Help us, Lord, to protect the mind, to learn to think, to set our minds on the things that matter. Thank You, O God, for the rich repository of Your Word and all those many books that speak of Your Word that provide for us an unending well of fresh, clear, cool, refreshing water of truth, that we might truly be saturated with that which is true, which is honorable, which is right, which is pure, which is lovely, which is of good repute. And since there is excellence in the Christian life and since there are some things so worthy of praise, we would think on these things. Guard us, Lord, that we might be all the more to Your glory. Amen.

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