

Six Steps to Spiritual Stability (Part 3)
Philippians 4:1-9
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Well, let's turn again this morning to Philippians chapter 4. It was in 1948 that Richard Weaver wrote a book entitled *Ideas Have Consequences*. Perhaps you've heard of that book, or you've read it. Certainly, you've heard the expression, "ideas have consequences." What Weaver was saying in his book is that ideas don't usually stay ideas. They eventually develop into action—into behavior. If adopted, those ideas can transform not only an individual life, but even an entire culture. That's why an article I read recently in *World Magazine* is so frightening to me. You've probably never heard the name of Peter Singer. But Peter Singer is a professor at Princeton in the Center for Human Values. He teaches practical ethics to undergraduate students there. He has sort of an unassuming look; he looks more like Mr. Rogers than a member of the academic elite. His credentials and his reputation, however, are unassailable in today's world and culture. *The New York Times* writes of Peter Singer, "no other living philosopher has had this kind of influence." *The New Yorker* says, "he is the most influential philosopher alive." *The New England Journal of Medicine* says "that he's had more success in effecting changes in acceptable behavior than any philosopher since Bertrand Russell." Peter Singer. Now, perhaps you're thinking that, well, he must be weighing in on the key cultural debates of our times—issues like abortion, issues like same-sex marriage. But he's way beyond those. In fact, he sees those as absolutely givens. Listen to some of what he's teaching a new generation of this nation's cultural elite in the halls of Princeton. In the article, he was quoted as saying that any kind of fully consensual sexual behavior—any kind—involving two people or two hundred is ethically fine, including necrophilia and bestiality, were a couple of the ones cited. The interviewer asked him some other questions. The interviewer says, "So what about parents conceiving and giving birth to a child specifically to kill him, take his organs, and transplant them into their ill older children?" Horrific! Listen to Singer's response, "Well, it's difficult to warm to parents who can take such a detached view, but they're not doing something really

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wrong in itself.” The interviewer says, “Well is there anything wrong with a society in which children are bred for spare parts on a massive scale?” The answer was, “No.” In the article, he affirms that it’s okay to kill one-year-olds with physical or mental disabilities. Though he says, ideally the question of infanticide would “be raised as soon as possible after birth.” The article goes on to detail more of the philosophy of Peter Singer, and it is absolutely frightening. It’s frightening to all of us, I think, because we understand that if that kind of philosophy is embraced, then the behavior will soon follow. The acts will soon come. You see, you and I can immediately see the connection between that mindset and the ethical behavior that will follow after it. Sadly, because of our fallen minds, it’s much more difficult for us to see the equally clear link between our thoughts and the behavior that will ultimately follow them. But the link is every bit as real as the link between Peter Singer’s thoughts and the behavior that will come.

You see, your thoughts have consequences. What goes on each day in the six inches between your ears is the most important thing about you. If I could get inside of your mind and somehow project those images on the screen, that go through your mind day after day, all of us could predict with a high degree of certainty what your character will become and what your destiny will be. What you think will determine what you are. As one person said, “You’re not what you think you are, but what you think, you are.” The Bible puts it this way. Proverbs 27 verse 19 says, “As in water, face reflects face, so the heart of man reflects man.” Your thoughts reflect who you really are. Proverbs 23:7 says, “as he thinks within himself, so he is.”

Our Lord, in Matthew 15 verses 18 and 19 points out that when we sin, our actions are not because of what enters into our body physically, but because of what our minds digest intellectually. In the early days of computers, you’ll remember that they used to talk about GIGO That is, garbage in, garbage out. If you think garbage, you will be garbage. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus traces our sinful behavior back to the spring from which our behavior flows. You remember in the Sermon on the Mount, He traces murder, which most of us would never think about, back to the thought of hate. He traces sexual sins of all kind back to their spring, which is lust in the heart. That’s why the familiar proverb says: sow a thought—reap an act; sow

an act—reap a habit; sow a habit—reap a character; sow a character—reap a destiny. You see, how we think defines our character. It determines our future, and it directs our destiny.

Scripture has so much to say about the role of the mind in the Christian life. But the one passage in all of Scripture that has the most direct application to the issue of right thinking is Philippians chapter 4 and verse 8. Now, let me remind you of the flow of this passage. You remember that these first nine verses of Philippians 4 are a unit. Their theme occurs in verse 1. We're reminded of what Paul is addressing here. He says, "Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown, in this way stand firm in the Lord, my beloved."

This passage is about spiritual stability. Paul wanted that for the Philippians, and he wants that for us—to be spiritually stable, not tossed everywhere, but to have a real spiritual maturity and stability. How does that happen? Well, verse 1, Paul says I want you to stand firm in this way. You see, what he's about to teach us is how to be spiritually stable. And the verses that follow, the rapid-fire commands that follow verse 1 outline the path to spiritual stability. In verses 2 through 9 Paul identifies six specific steps to spiritual stability. We've examined the first four. Let me just remind you briefly of what they are. In verses 1 through 3 we saw the first step is to resolve to live in harmony with other Christians. That's where spiritual stability begins, because we get so much of our strength and stability from those around us. That's by God's design. That's why he uses the image of a body to describe the church—inter-related, interdependent parts. So, if you're going to be spiritually stable, you have to start by being in harmony with other believers.

The second step we saw was in verse 4. Determine to face life's circumstances with joy. He says, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say rejoice." No matter what comes. No matter what circumstances God sovereignly brings into your life, determine to face them with joy.

In verse 5 we found the third step. Make it your ambition to be known for a gentle spirit. The word “gentle” meaning gracious. A gracious spirit. A gracious spirit shows humility. Humility is at the core of being spiritually stable because God promises to give grace to the humble.

Verses 6 and 7, we saw the fourth step which is talk to God about everything.

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Now that brings us to the fifth step to spiritual stability and it’s found in verse 8. Choose to think about the right things. 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 there is anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.

You see, spiritual stability is about thinking. Now, there are a lot of unbelievers who think that believers don’t think. I was surprised to hear that on the night of the recent election (2004), a commentator named Chris Matthews, I believe on MSNBC, said something like this. This is not a direct quote, but this is a paraphrase: It’s shocking that our next president is being chosen by people who believe God created the world in six literal days. I read an article this week by Garrison Keillor of *Prairie Home Companion* of Public Radio. Some of you have enjoyed his programs. Garrison Keillor was raised in a legalistic Christian home, and has since repudiated all of that, but in a speech he gave before a university crowd, I believe it was, he said that he is now leading the campaign—and he said this somewhat tongue-in-cheek—but you can see his vitriol coming through. He says I’m now leading the campaign to see Christian voters disenfranchised because obviously they’re not of this world. Unbelievers tend to think of

Christians as being devoid of deep thought. But the truth is, it's their thinking that is twisted and distorted.

Listen to what God says about the minds of those who have not yet come to know Him: Romans 1:28, He says their minds are depraved; Second Corinthians 3:14, "their minds are hardened"; Second Corinthians 4:4, their minds are blind; Ephesians 4:17, their minds are futile—that is, they're worthless, they are pursuing absolutely worthless things; Ephesians 4:18, their minds are darkened; Colossians 1:21, their minds are hostile toward God; Colossians 2:4, their minds are deluded; Colossians 2:8, their minds are deceived; Colossian 2:18, their minds are sensuous—that is, driven by their own sensual desires; First Timothy 6:5, their minds are depraved; Second Timothy 3:8, their minds are corrupt; and Titus 1:15, their minds are defiled. That's what God thinks of the minds of those who have not come to know him. In fact, look in Philippians chapter 3 verse 19. You remember, we met this group who professed to be Christians but aren't, and it says, the end of verse 19, "they set their minds on earthly things." That's a description of us. That's what we used to be. Our minds used to be darkened and blind and depraved and defiled and hostile toward God.

But then, in that amazing event of spiritual life when God breathed spiritual life into our souls at the moment of salvation—that event called regeneration, God opens our minds. He opens our minds at that moment to understand the truth of the gospel. Hebrews 8:10 says He puts His law into our minds. He writes His law, as it were, on our hearts. And 1 Corinthians 2:16 says He's given us the very mind of Christ. That transformation of our minds that occurs at salvation—that transformation that begins the moment we believe, initiates a lifelong process in which our minds are gradually renewed, and our thinking patterns are changed by the Word of God and the work of the Spirit. Let me show you this. Turn to Romans chapter 12. It's not just what happens at the moment of salvation, but this process of our minds being renewed. Romans chapter 12 verse 1. After Paul has set the stage in describing the amazing realities of the mercies of God—that is, God's mercy to us in salvation, God's mercy to us in justification. He says in verse 1, "Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living

and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service of worship.” And then he says, verse 2, “Do not be conformed to this world.”

Now what does that mean? It’s a very interesting expression. Literally it means, don’t allow your mind to be pushed into the mold of the age. That’s what it really says. Don’t allow your mind to be pushed into the mold of the age in which you live—the values and the mindset that characterize the age in which you live. But instead, be transformed. That word “transformed” is the word from which we get our English word “metamorphosis.” Be metamorphosized by the renewing of your mind. So that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. Colossians chapter 3 verse 2 says, “Set your minds on things above.”

When God saved us, He changed our minds. He allowed us to see again. He allowed us to understand the truth again. But that begins a process that continues throughout our lives—a process of being renewed in our minds. Our minds play a crucial role in our faith. In Matthew 22 you remember the words of Christ. He says, “Love the Lord your God with all your mind.” Your mind! In 1 Corinthians 14 verses 14 to 16, Paul says pray with your mind. And he says—this is interesting—sing with your mind. When we lift our praise to God, does your mind engage? Paul says sing with your mind.

Another author writes “Too many people go to church not to think or to reason about the truths of Scripture, but to get their weekly spiritual high—to feel that God is still with them. Such people are spiritually unstable because they base their lives on feeling rather than on thinking.” Now why is it true that if you base your life on emotion rather than thinking, you’re more unstable as a believer? Well, John Stott, in his book *Your Mind Matters* warns about living by feelings. Listen to what he says, “Sin has more dangerous effects on our faculty of feeling than on our faculty of thinking.” Why is it that sin would affect our feelings more than they affect our thoughts? He goes on “Because our opinions, or our thoughts, are more easily checked and regulated by revealed truth than our experiences.” It’s a lot easier to hold your thinking against the standard of God’s Word than to hold your experiences. So, your experience is prone—your

feelings are prone to a lot more misleading. We must choose, Paul says, to think, and to think rightly. In fact, this whole issue of thinking determines whether or not you're a believer. It demonstrates whether or not you're truly in Christ. Turn to Romans chapter 8. Paul lays down in Romans chapter 8 a dichotomy between those who are Christians and those who aren't. And he says in verse 5,

Those who are according to the flesh [that is, who are unregenerate, and you'll see that as this passage develops—they] set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, [they] set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

You and I must choose to set our minds on the things above, as Paul says in Colossians 3. That's the issue in Philippians chapter 4. When we come to Philippians chapter 4, Paul is saying, choose to set your mind on the right things. And he says spiritual stability is the result of how a person thinks. This morning, if you would characterize yourself honestly as not being spiritually stable, then I can promise you that a great deal of the problem is how you think and what you choose to think about.

Keep your thumb in Philippians chapter 4—we're going to come back there and look at it in detail in a moment but turn to Psalm 139. David underscores this point. In Psalm 139, verse 23, these familiar words—we even sing them in a familiar tune. He says, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way."

Now there are a couple of conclusions we can make from those verses. The first, and this is a really a frightening thought, is that God knows our thoughts. In fact, you go earlier in Psalm 139

and it says God knows our thoughts from a distance. The idea is, God knows our thoughts before we think them. In fact, because of God's omniscience—that is, God's knowing everything and His knowing it eternally—God knew every thought you would ever have in eternity past before He ever created you. God knows our thoughts. But there's another conclusion in these two verses, and that is, that any real and lasting change in our lives must begin with our thoughts. David says, God, ransack my heart, look at my thoughts, and then I'll be able to pursue the everlasting way. Real lasting change starts within, with our thoughts.

Now that brings us back to the text of Philippians chapter 4 and verse 8. He begins verse 8 with the word “finally.” Now I know, some of you think that's a word preachers use just to give you some hope that they're about to finish. But that's not at all what Paul is doing here. The word “finally” means he's approaching the end of this sort of brief list of commands to become stable, and he's introducing a fresh idea that has no relationship to the verse right before it. And in this verse, as he introduces it, we have a grid, if you will. A grid of eight virtues that are to regulate what we allow between our ears. If you're a follower of Jesus Christ, then you must think like this. Now, look at the list. You'll see that first of all, there are six specific criteria: whatever is true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, and of good reputation or repute. And then there are two general, sort of overarching summaries. He says if there's any excellence, and if there's anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. You see, these are the rules. These eight virtues are the rules God has set down for a thought life that honors Him. Now, ultimately, this verse can only be perfectly fulfilled by thinking about God's Word. God's Word is the only thing that perfectly meets all of these. But if all Paul meant in verse 8 was “think about God's Word” he could have said that. He could have said, “Think about Scripture.” So why does he give us this list? Because Paul lived in the real world. I think sometimes we forget that. We think that, you know, Paul lived in an ivory tower somewhere and he didn't face what you and I face. Paul lived in the real world, and because of that, he knew that we have to think about things other than Scripture. And so, he teaches us, to borrow a recent advertisement I saw of watching Monday night football, he teaches us how to live in our world and think in God's.

Let's look at these specific qualities. The first is "true." Our thoughts are to be true. This refers to what is genuine and real, instead of what is false and pretense. In fact, there's an interesting use of this word in Acts chapter 12. You remember the story of Peter, how he's put into prison and the angel comes during the night and frees him. In verse 9 of Acts 12, it says "Peter went out and continued to follow, and he did not know that what was being done by the angel was real." The word "real" is our word "true," because he thought he was seeing a vision. So, our thoughts are to be real. The real thing. What does that mean? Our thoughts are to conform to reality. Our thoughts are to be true. They're to conform to reality. So many people allow their minds to focus on their worries or their fears, they live in an imaginary world of fear. But there's another application in our culture, and that's the issue of amusement. Now, there's nothing wrong with amusement in and of itself. It has its place. But folks, the word "amusement" is an interesting word. To muse means "to think." "A" is a negative. It means "not to think." Amusement. Doing something that doesn't cause you to think. It's okay to have a little bit. It's okay to give your mind a rest. But many, including Christians, live in imaginary worlds of fiction and fantasy. Whether it's in a world you've created in your mind, or whether it's an unhealthy dose of novels or of television or of movies or of computer games—we must choose as Christians to think primarily about what is true—that which conforms to reality, as opposed to that which is unreal and imaginary.

Secondly, he says, our thoughts must be honorable. The word "honorable" is used in Titus and Timothy to speak of one of the qualifications of elders and deacons. There, it's translated "dignified." This is a rich word, and it's really hard to translate with one English word. It's often used in the Greek world to describe that which is noble, majestic—that which demands honor and respect. It refers to lofty things—thoughts that lift our minds from the cheap and vulgar to that which is noble. Let's just be honest. We live in a base, vulgar society. I mean, where else, in whatever kind of society would a shock jock like Howard Stern, whom all of us are tired of reading about in the papers, who runs a perverted side show, have millions of listeners? It's a base culture we live in. It's a vulgar culture. As Christians, we are to choose,

instead, to focus on what is noble. We're children of the King. We're to rise above the base and vulgar, and to think instead about what elevates and ennobles the mind. Whatever is honorable.

The third criteria he gives us is "right." Right. This is a very common word in the New Testament. It's usually translated "righteous." It refers to that which meets the standard. Let me illustrate this word for you this way. In the Old Testament, this word is used when God says, I want you merchants to use right or righteous weights. Now what did He mean by that? Well, in the ancient world, you would do commerce with the use of scales. On one side of the scale, you would put whatever you were purchasing or selling. And on the other side of the scale, you would put a weight that was supposed to be a certain amount of weight. And that way, you would determine how much grain or whatever it was you were selling. Well, unscrupulous merchants, depending on whether they were buying or selling, would use a weight that either had a little bit shaved off of it to make it lighter, or a weight that had a little extra on it to make it heavier. So the transaction would come to their advantage. God says, oh no, I want you to use right or righteous weights. Weights that conform to the standard. That's what this word means. Our thoughts must conform to the standard of what God says—to the standard of what is expected and acceptable. This word is also used in Titus 1:8 of elders. There we're told the elders are to be just or righteous. What Paul says here in Philippians 4 is that what must characterize the lives of the church's leaders should characterize all of our thoughts. They should conform to the standard of God's Word, and to the standard of what's just, what's acceptable.

Fourthly, he says our thoughts should be pure. This embraces the idea of moral purity and holiness. It's the opposite of what is sleazy and dirty. In fact, it's often used in contrast to sexual sin. Turn to 2 Corinthians chapter 11. You'll see this word used. Second Corinthians 11:1, Paul is defending his apostleship with those in the church in Corinth who were attacking him, and he says in verse 1, "I wish that you would bear with me in a little foolishness." In other words, he said, defending myself is really foolish, but I need to do it for the sake of my ministry—not for my own.

“But indeed you are bearing with me. For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ, I might present you as a pure [there’s our word] virgin.” A pure virgin. That is, one set apart from any sexual sin. They are entering into the relationship, into marriage, with no sexual relations. This word encompasses that, but it’s even broader. Any kind of impurity is not to be in our thoughts, including sexual impurity. Let me just ask you, are you choosing to think about things that can be described as pure? God says, that’s how Christians think.

He adds, “lovely.” Lovely. This is only used here in the New Testament. Its basic meaning is that which inspires love. It’s that which people consider lovable. Lovely. Attractive. Winsome. It is the opposite of what is disgusting. One writer puts it this way. Those things which give pleasure to all and cause distaste to none, like a welcome fragrance. We are to set our minds on those things that elicit not disgust, but admiration and affection. In other words, if people could get inside your head and look at your thoughts, they would not be disgusted by what they find there, but you would be found to be attractive because of what’s in your head.

Number six in our little list here, he says your thoughts are to be of good repute. This also is found only here in the New Testament. It means that we are to think about those things that have a good reputation—that are highly spoken of. By whom? By those that are godly. The things that we think about have a good reputation among those who love God.

Now, that’s not an exhaustive list. There are a lot of other qualities or virtues that should characterize our thoughts. And so, Paul says, just in case I didn’t catch you with one of those, let me back up and give you two big summaries. He says, “if there is any excellence.” This word “excellence” was a common Greek word. It was often translated “virtue,” which was a big Greek concept. But here he informs it not with Greek thinking but with the Old Testament. It’s probably best to translate this word as it’s translated in 2 Peter 1:5 as “moral excellence.” If there’s any moral excellence, then think about that. You can find something that is morally excellent, then you’re free to think about it—to dwell on it. And he adds, “if anything worthy of

praise.” This is used in the New Testament of that which deserves both man’s praise and God’s praise. He says, listen, focus your mental energy on what is morally excellent and what deserves the praise of men and of God. Paul says, and he concludes the verse with this sort of wrapping it all up—he says, “dwell on these things.” Because of the tense of the Greek verb, we could translate that last phrase this way: Habitually discipline your mind to think about these things. Now, what does that exactly mean? Paul loves this expression that’s translated “dwell on.” He uses it thirty-four of the forty times it’s used in the New Testament. The word means “to reckon.” In fact, you remember the early chapters of Romans where we run across that expression a lot. That’s this word. To calculate—to take into account—to evaluate. But there’s another sense of it, and I think it’s the sense he intends here. It means to ponder, to reflect upon. It is focused consideration of something. You must choose to concentrate your mind on these things. Now, it’s not that you never have to think about anything that’s the opposite of these virtues. Again, Paul lived in the real world. He understood. You’re going to be forced to think about other things. But choose to concentrate on these things. The question is, when you can choose where to direct your mind, where does it go?

Scientists tell us that the brain processes about ten thousand independent thoughts a day. Ten thousand! Some have more, and some have less, but on average, ten thousand. Some of those are forced upon you. You’re at work. There’s something you have to give your mind to. There are thoughts you have to consider in your work. When you’re driving—well not everyone thinks when they drive—some people talk on cell phones. But you have to think about what you’re doing. You have to direct your thoughts. You’re forced, if you will, to think about something outside of yourself. But what about when you’re choosing? There are a lot of those ten thousand thoughts every day when you are in the driver’s seat and you can choose what to think about. What do you choose? Does your mind go to the imaginary? The false? The base? The vulgar? The unrighteous? The morally dirty? The unattractive? The disgusting? That which has a bad reputation among those who know and love God? Or instead, when you can choose where to direct your mental energies, do you invest in what is morally excellent, what deserves the praise of men and of God? What do you choose? You see, you can choose where you allow

your mind to go. You do choose where you allow your mind to go. Now I know some of you may be sitting there thinking, yeah, that's true generally, but there are thoughts that come into my mind that come in unwelcomed and uninvited. Well, that's true. Scientists and those who observe human behavior have been able to discover that all of us have the occasional thought that sort of—we ask ourselves “Where did that come from?” You know, the thought like when you're standing on the top of a tall building and there's this momentary glimmer that says, “I wonder what it would feel like to jump off.” Have you ever had that thought? Hopefully you've never acted on it. It is true—we can have thoughts that enter our minds unwelcomed and uninvited. But, as one writer said, it's also true that a bird can land on your head, but you don't have to let him build a nest there. John Owen, the Puritan, put it like this, and I love this description. He says, if we think like Christians

We can test ourselves by asking whether our spiritual thoughts [we're talking about spiritual thoughts now—these kinds of thoughts as in chapter 4 verse 8] are like guests visiting a hotel or like children living at home. There's a temporary stir and bustle when guests arrive, yet within a little while they leave and are forgotten. The hotel is then prepared for other guests. So, it is with religious thoughts that are only occasional. But children belong to their house. They are missed if they don't come home. Preparation is continually being made for their food and comfort. Spiritual thoughts that arise from true spiritual mindedness are like the children of the house, always expected, and certainly inquired for if missing.

Are your thoughts (like Philippians 4:8) like guests in a hotel when they come? They don't really belong there and they're going to move on pretty quickly and you're going to fill your mind with other things? Or are they like the children who live there? And they sometimes are forced to leave home for various reasons because you have to focus your attention on work or other things, but as soon as able, they return home, and they feel perfectly at home in your mind? Paul says dwell on these things.

Now let me give you a couple of practical applications. This passage is practical in and of itself but let me back up and sort of look at the big picture and give you a couple of practical suggestions. First of all, this passage tells us that we need to beware of unbiblical philosophies that may influence us. Paul puts this very clearly in 2 Corinthians chapter 10. Turn there for a moment. Second Corinthians chapter 10. This is a passage that I know at some point, we'll look at in detail. But notice what he says. Verse 3. "For though we walk in the flesh we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh." In other words, we live as human beings, but our weapons—the weapons we use in our battle are not human weapons. "But they are divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses."

Wow! That's an interesting picture of our lives. We're destroying fortresses! What are these fortresses? Well, notice verse 5. Destroying speculations. The Greek word "speculations" could mean philosophies, ideologies, ways of thinking, world views. We are destroying those speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God—everything that exalts itself against God—every mindset, every value system, every ideology, every philosophy that exalts itself against God. Now, folks, let's just be honest. When you pick up anything in today's culture, you are bombarded with philosophy. Whether you pick up your newspaper, whether you listen to a newscast, whether you talk to a friend at work, whether you watch a movie, watch television, you are confronted with philosophy. There is a speculation, an ideology that drives that. Paul says, beware. Use the word of God, the Scripture. Did you notice the end of verse 5 "to take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ"? Don't let that speculation, that philosophy influence your thinking. Just for example, you can't pick up a book as I did this last week—a book about history. And it began talking about evolution as if it were absolute established fact. I guess I'm one of those anachronistic people Chris Matthews was talking about. But you, if you're not careful, can be influenced by the ideologies of the culture. Take secular humanism. It's everywhere. Moral relativism. I mean, how many times have you heard somebody say, "Well, it's okay, I mean, it's not hurting anybody. If they want to do that, that's fine." That's moral relativism. That's a speculation. Don't allow it to affect your thinking.

That's what Paul is saying. Not only use the Word of God to confront the speculations that are influencing you, but to tear down the fortresses that other people have built as well.

There's another practical application of this passage and that is, guard your thinking from dwelling on the opposite of these virtues. This is the negative side. Paul says dwell on these things. What he means obviously is, don't dwell on the others. Proverbs 4:23, Solomon says, guard your heart. "Set a guard before your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life"

Guard your heart. You know, if your computer is like mine—if you use it on the internet at all or if you get email—you probably have some kind of an anti-virus program. Something on your computer that is constantly looking at what comes in and filtering through it looking for those things that would negatively affect it. That's what we're to do with our hearts. That's what we're to do with our thoughts. We're to be constantly sifting through them. We are to be using the Word of God—our own antivirus software—protecting our hearts from those things that can damage them.

The third application is the positive side. Choose to set your mind only on those things that meet these standards. First Thessalonians 5:21, Paul says examine everything and hold fast to that which is good. That's what we're talking about here. There's a lot that goes on in the world around us. There's a lot that you're confronted with to think about. Examine everything and hold fast to that which is good. By the way, what we're talking about here isn't a psychological trick. It isn't what psychologists would call sublimation. Let's say fear for example. Sublimation would say, okay, you're afraid? Then what you need to do is just start thinking about beautiful things, and as you fill your mind with beautiful thoughts, you'll forget your fear. That's not what Paul's saying. That's not the Biblical way to think. The Biblical way is to confront your unbiblical thinking head-on. You need to talk to yourself. I love what Martyn Lloyd-Jones says so often in his writings. It's been such a great help to me to understand this. And that is, he says the problem with most Christians is that they spend far too much time

listening to themselves, and not nearly enough time talking to themselves. Not out loud obviously, you know, they might lock you up. But he's saying we have a tendency to just sort of listen to whatever comes into our minds. But true Biblical thinking—true Christian thinking—is to talk to ourselves. Take the example of fear I just gave. You don't fill your mind with beautiful thoughts. You grab your mind, as it were, by the scruff of the neck, and you say, listen, think about this. Am I really going to be afraid when I know that God is absolutely in control of all of my circumstances? Am I really going to be afraid when God has promised never to leave me—to always be present for my good? Am I really going to be afraid when God didn't spare His own Son but sent Him? Am I going to think that He really isn't going to care for me and that He's going to allow something to happen to me that isn't for my best? No, the solution isn't the sort of Julie Andrews approach of thinking happy thoughts. It's confronting your unbiblical thinking with truth. Talking to yourself with the truth.

Finally, and I do mean that, in the sense of finally. Constantly choose to meditate on God's Word. You see, it's the only thing we know that perfectly meets all the criteria for Philippians 4:8. In Psalm 1, you remember, as David opens up the Psalter there in Psalms, he begins with this contrast of the way of the righteous and the way of the wicked, and he begins by saying the righteous man delights in the law of God. He finds his joy, his satisfaction, in the law of God. And listen to how he describes the righteous man. "And in His law, he meditates day and night".

Take some of those ten thousand thoughts that you have each day and force your mind to think about God's revelation. You do that, then you can be assured that you're thinking as Paul prescribes in Philippians chapter 4. Colossians chapter 3, Paul puts it this way "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly."

That's the New Testament expression of Old Testament meditation. To think like a Christian is to think in line with God's revelation. What you choose to think about will determine your actions, your habits, your character, and ultimately your destiny. In the end, what Paul is saying

in Philippians chapter 4 is, we as Christians must bring every thought under the authority of Christ. He's saying, think like a Christian. Learn to live in this world and to think in God's.

Let's pray together. Father, thank You for the forthrightness of Your word. Thank You for how practically it speaks to the issues of our lives. Lord, this is so clear, that if we would be spiritually stable, we must think in these ways. Father, we confess to You that we have been lazy. We have allowed our minds to drift. We have listened to ourselves rather than talking to ourselves with things that meet these criteria. Forgive us, Father, and help us to be diligent. And Lord, I pray for the person who didn't see himself or herself in these verses, but instead saw exactly the opposite. As they examine their own heart, they have to admit that they are blind, that their minds are defiled, that they don't know You, that they are hostile toward You. Lord, I pray that today You would bring them to a place of true understanding. That you would remove the blindness. Help them to see and help them to repent—to leave their sin for the beauty and the glory of Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen