



JUNE 6, 2021 | PASTOR PETER YI

“Your Mind Matters” (Philippians 4:8-9)

⁸ Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. ⁹ Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

When it comes to our Christian lives, not enough attention is given to the role of our minds. When we become Christians, our focus is more on the changes that occur in our hearts. The Bible considers the heart as the very center of our beings. Our heart of stone has been replaced with a heart of flesh. As well, a lot of our Christian experience revolves around our feelings, and that's not incorrect either. Our feelings or our affections are changed when we become Christians. We experience the feeling of divine love, in forgiveness for our sins, in being accepted, welcomed, and treasured as God's child. The expressions of our feelings toward God are a regular part of our Christian lives. We also talk a lot about Christian behavior. We know right away that the things we used to do before we became Christians, we can no longer do. The Bible gives tons and tons of examples of that. Here's one:

(Ephesians. 4:28) Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must **work**, doing something useful with their own **hands**, that they may have something to share with those in need.

So, we know that Christian life affects our hearts, the very core of our being; we know it affects our feelings or affections, the emotional side of our lives; and we know Christianity affects our behavior, the things that we do. But again, probably not enough attention is given to the role of the mind. How should I think? What should I be thinking about?

However, when we look to the Bible, we'll find that the mind plays a huge role in our spiritual lives. In fact, apart from the full usage of our minds, we cannot grow, we cannot worship, we cannot change, we cannot know God, we cannot please God. Let me give you a sample of some verses that focus on the role of the mind.

(Matthew 22:37) Jesus replied: “**Love the Lord your God** with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your **mind**.”

(Romans 1:28) Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved **mind**, so that they do what ought not to be done. (mind and behaviour go hand in hand)

(Romans 8:5) Those who live according to the flesh have their **minds** set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their **minds** set on what the Spirit desires. ⁶ The **mind** governed by the flesh is death, but the **mind** governed by the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷ The **mind** governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so.

(Romans 12:1) Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. ² Do not



conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your **mind**. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

(Romans 14:5) One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own **mind**.

(1 Corinthians. 1:10) I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in **mind** and thought.

(1 Corinthians. 2:14) The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit. ¹⁵ The person with the Spirit makes judgments about all things, but such a person is not subject to merely human judgments, ¹⁶ for,

“Who has known the **mind** of the Lord
so as to instruct him?”

But we have the **mind** of Christ.

(1 Corinthians. 14:13) For this reason the one who speaks in a tongue should pray that they may interpret what they say. ¹⁴ For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my **mind** is unfruitful. ¹⁵ So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my understanding; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my understanding.

(2 Corinthians 4:4) The god of this age has blinded the **minds** of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

(2 Corinthians 11:3) But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your **minds** may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

(Ephesians 4:22) You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; ²³ to be made new in the attitude of your **minds**; ²⁴ and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

(Philippians 4:2) I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same **mind** in the Lord.

(Philippians 4:7) And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your **minds** in Christ Jesus.

(1 Peter 1:13) Therefore, with **minds** that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming.

From that sample of verses we can see how vital a role the mind plays in our lives.

In Philippians 4:8 Paul instructs us about the things that we should be thinking about. Let's read the verse again:

(Philippians 4:8) Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—**think** about such things.



Let me draw your attention to a few things about this verse. First, there are six specific things and two general things that we are to be thinking about. The six specific things are things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, and admirable. The two general things are things that are excellent and praiseworthy.

Second, we are commanded to think about and contemplate these things.

Third, there is the repetition of the word “whatever.” Before each of the six things, he inserts the word “whatever.” He could have written it like this, “Whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, and admirable. But instead he writes, “whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable.” And then related to all these ‘whatevers’ he uses the word ‘anything’. If anything is excellent or praiseworthy.

Now, let's look at these things in more detail. Paul begins his list with whatever is true. The Christian worldview has a lot to say about truth. First, the very basis of truth, from a Christian point of view, which we believe to be the correct point of view, is that something is true because God determines it to be so. Many Christians struggle with this and even deny it. But this is something that all Christians must come to terms with. Something is true because God determines it to be true. Here's an example. Killing is wrong. Why? Well, it's wrong because it violates the other person's right to go on living. It's wrong because it harms the other person. It's wrong because for it to be right would make society into a very dangerous and chaotic place to live. It's wrong because our society says it's wrong. We can think of many reasons for why killing, murder is wrong. And those are all good and valid reasons, but from a Christian worldview, the reason that murder is wrong is because God has determined it to be wrong. He is the source of truth. So when we hear the phrase, “all truth is God's truth,” we heartily agree with that.

Well, we then need to ask, how do we know what God has determined to be truth? Jesus answers that for us in saying, “Your word is truth.” (John 17:17). God's Word, revealed to us in the holy Bible, is God's truth. Thus, we do not have the right to say, this part of the Bible is true and I accept it as true, but this other part, I don't think is true, and I will not accept it as true. It is all God's truth.

This understanding of truth necessarily implies that there are things that are false. That means that we cannot believe the common view of our culture that says, “That may be true for you, but it's not true for me.” “That may be *your* truth, but that's not *my* truth.” Not all worldviews are true. In reality, there is no person who lives by or can live by the statement, “everything is true.” It's impossible. Well, so much more can be said about truth, but we'll have to leave it at that. Whatever is true, we are to think about these things.

Next, whatever is noble. Here are some synonyms that can help us better understand what this word means. Honorable, venerable, dignity, grandeur, solemnity, temperance. Paul uses this word to describe deacons in the church who are “worthy of respect,” in other words, they are noble. He says that the older men in the church are to be “worthy or respect,” that is, noble. He uses the word to describe the kind of life we are to live in a secular society. How should Christians live amongst non-Christians? With nobility, dignity, seriousness, in a way that is honorable.

How should we apply this? Consider the manner of life that you and I live in the church, in our families, and in the world. If you are an older man or woman in the church, do you portray yourself in such a way that the younger men and women look up to you as a person who is honorable, venerable, dignity, and worthy of respect? In some cultures, we know that respect is something that must be given to someone just by the sheer fact that they are older. And the Bible teaches that to some degree too, but the main reason for why we should respect older people is based on the character and conduct of the person, not just because of their age, and we know that in reality, true respect doesn't merely come because someone holds a position, or because someone has wealth, or because someone has gray hair or a graying beard, like me.



True respect is given because that person lives a life that is worthy of respect. That means all of us should examine our lives, we should think about our lives and ask, what about my life is worthy of respect, and what about my life would not make me worthy of respect. Let's get even more specific. Does the way I handle life's problems, the way I view my wealth and possessions, the way I treat the members of my family, the way I view work, the use of my time, the investment I make into the lives of people...do these things show my nobility? Take some time this week to think about such things.

Third, whatever is right. The word for "right" comes from the word for justice or righteousness. Here, it is specifically addressing right behavior, righteous behavior. So here are some ways we can apply this. As a businessman or woman, am I fair in all my dealings? They say that with all this online learning, that cheating has become easier and that many more are doing it. So, as a student, am I honest, have I committed before God, not to cheat on my exams. Do I report all of my earnings on my tax return? Are all my deductions that I claim truly legitimate claims? If I have employees or subordinates, am I fair with them? I may demand a lot from them, but am I fair, showing no preferential treatment, not taking advantage of them, not paying them too little. So think about your life of integrity, your life of justice.

Next is, whatever is pure. Purity of course refers to moral purity, things that are morally blameless. This word has as its root, the word holy, where we get the word saint or holy one. We are told in scripture to keep ourselves pure, to keep ourselves from being polluted by the world. A virgin is considered pure. A wife is called to win over her husband by her pure life. The wisdom that comes from God is considered pure, clean, undefiled. As Christians, we are called to purify ourselves, just as Jesus is pure. So think about your life or morality; your thought life, your actions and behavior. What areas would be called into question for not being pure? The presence of greed, lust, jealousy and anger can reveal to us that we are not so pure. Think about those things.

Fifth, whatever is lovely. This is not describing British folks who like to say, "oh, that's lovely." The word in the Greek contains a prefix which means "toward" and then the word for love. Put them together and you have the meaning, 'toward love,' 'toward that which is lovely.' The Greek dictionary defines it as, something that is acceptable or pleasing. Another dictionary says, "that which causes people to be pleased with something." One commentator says that which is pleasing, attractive, beautiful. If we look at the other five things surrounding this word, they all seem to address something about Christian character, so I don't think this word lovely is primarily speaking about some beautiful thing in nature like a forest or beach or animal that we would think is beautiful or lovely. It must mean that which is beautiful about our Christian character.

Think of it like this. When a man or woman first falls in love, yes there's that physical attraction. A woman's beautiful features, a man's chiseled face, or chiseled abs. For example, when I call my wife's phone, what appears on her screen is "My Hunk." Now to be totally honest, I put that there. But to be totally honest, she didn't change it. So, I think we all have to conclude that after 27 years of marriage, she still thinks of me as her hunk. Anyway, in addition to the physical attraction, we may think of our partner and say, "I love that she's so kind." Or "He's a very strong leader. I love that about him." Or "She has this inner strength." Or "He's never afraid to take on a challenge." And as you think about these qualities, you say, "I love that about him, about her." So when Paul says, think about things that are attractive, beautiful, lovely. What is it in other people that you find lovely? Think about these things. Give thanks to God for these things.

Finally, whatever is admirable. This word implies good will toward others, to speak kindly of others, to be worthy of praise. How are we to apply this. Here's an example. Let's say that one day, you were thinking about the members of your life group, and you begin thinking about unique qualities that each person has. This one always says an encouraging word. This person never criticizes. This person is always trying to meet the needs of others.



This one person always contributes very thoughtful comments to the Bible study and so on. So, you spend time thinking about these things that are admirable about each of these persons, either to emulate them in your own life, or to express appreciation to those persons.

So those are the six qualities, the six things we should be thinking about—things that are true, noble, right, pure lovely, and admirable. Then Paul mentions two overarching things. He says, if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. What is he referring to?

Excellence refers to moral excellence. It means to be virtuous. And then praiseworthy or course means things that are worthy or praise, of course in the eyes of God. These two words seem to act as a summary of the six qualities previously mentioned. So, these are the things we should be thinking about.

Now, I want to draw your attention once again to the word “Whatever and anything.” Like I said earlier, Paul intentionally inserts that word before each of the six things we are to think about. And then he uses the word “anything” before the two summary words. Is there any area that “whatever” doesn’t cover? Is there any part that “anything” excludes? No. He wants to leave no area of our minds untouched. Every part of our thought life is to be under scrutiny. He’s laying great emphasis on the importance of our thought life and the place of our minds in our sanctification.

Let me conclude this section by talking for a moment about what it means to think. First, it means to continuously think. It’s not one of these things that you’ve thought about at one point in your life, way in the past, and never need to think about again. Rather, we are to always think about these things. Throughout the day, and throughout our lives.

Second the word ‘think’ means literally to consider, to realize, to regard, to reason, to reckon, to deliberate, to meditate. The NASB says, to dwell. The same word is used when Paul says, “consider yourselves dead to sin but alive to God.” Old translations use the word, “reckon.” So apply this to one of the six things. Think about whatever is true. Consider whatever is true, realize whatever is true, regard whatever is true, reason about whatever is true, deliberate about whatever is true, meditate on whatever is true. You get the idea. Christianity, I believe, is the most intellectually rigorous worldview or religion of them all. Your mind is never off the hook. It is always engaged.

So, what are we to take away from all of this? A preacher named Albert Martin gave these very helpful insights. He shared four points of application.

First, this precludes us from thinking of anything that is evil. There is no place in our thought life of thinking of or being preoccupied with anything that is evil. Our minds can be preoccupied with lustful thoughts. This is especially true for those who are younger. That’s why the psalmist wrote,

(Psalm 119:9) How can a young person stay on the path of purity?

By living according to your word.

- 10 I seek you with all my heart;
do not let me stray from your commands.
- 11 I have hidden your word in my heart
that I might not sin against you.
- 12 Praise be to you, LORD;
teach me your decrees.
- 13 With my lips I recount
all the laws that come from your mouth.



- 14 I rejoice in following your statutes
as one rejoices in great riches.
- 15 I meditate on your precepts
and consider your ways.
- 16 I delight in your decrees;
I will not neglect your word.

Second, Albert Martin said, we must not unnecessarily expose our minds to evil. Now Albert Martin was preaching around 30-40 years ago, before the advent of the internet and social media, and Netflix and all of that. So, aren't his words so much more necessary and applicable for us today, than it was for people back then? Our minds are constantly bombarded with evil from every direction. Think of all the entertainment, video games, politics, tiktok videos, blogs and vlogs that we have access to. Of all those things what percentage of them are evil as God defines evil. Who are we to think that this repeated and constant exposure to these things 24/7, as the first thing we look at when we wake up and the last thing we look at before we go to sleep, will not have a spiritual impact on us? You and I, as Christians, must have some moral filters that guide what we allow through our eyes and ears, and into our minds.

Third, we must have a positive commitment to the pursuit of Christian virtues. When Paul repeats six times, "whatever", he means everything that is true, everything that is honorable and so on. That means that we must be very intentional about the role and place of our minds in our lives as Christians. We are not permitted to just turn off our brains, ever. We must be constantly vigilant and discerning. And we must be constantly working toward growing in having and displaying the mind of Christ.

Finally, Albert Martin says, we must be committed to constant exposure to how we learn what are the virtues are. That means we are to saturate ourselves with the word of God. That's where we find all these things. This is where we know what is true and right and lovely and pure. If we do not regularly search the scriptures and allow its truths to occupy our minds, then it will be replaced with the world's values and with human wisdom.

So that's the area of the mind, but that's not all. The next verse tells us that in addition to the focus on the mind, it must go alongside what we do, our Christian behavior. Christian thinking and Christian doing go hand and in. They are inseparable. Let's look at verse 9:

⁹ Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

Here is the second command. The first was, "Think about such things." And the second is, "Put it into practice." Do these things. Paul tells us here how we grow. We grow by imitating those mature Christians around us. Look at the comprehensive nature of how this works. First he says, Whatever you have learned from me. Then, whatever you have received from me. Next, whatever you have heard from me. And finally, whatever you have seen in me. Isn't that really helpful? It's kind of like how parenting works, or at least the best kind of parenting. This is how we guide our children to mature and grow. Whatever you have learned, received, heard, and seen in mom and dad, put it into practice, do these things! It's the same for the Christian life. You and I are to do these things. That's how we grow. And in doing these things, we are also serving as a model to help others grow. That's what I love about the church. I love it when older ladies instruct the younger ladies. And I love it when older men instruct the younger men. This happens all the time, sometimes intentionally, through advice given, but sometimes it occurs unintentionally, just by being in each other's presence, just by hanging out together. Isn't it true for every one of us, that we grew because we were taught by someone else, and we imitated someone else? We learned to pray by copying others who prayed. We learned to live out certain virtues by watching others.



Here's the key to all of this. You must do it. In our sanctification there are things that God does and there are things that we do. We all know that, but sometimes we can fall into this kind of thinking where we think that God will grow us and mature us apart from our involvement and effort. Just think how foolish that kind of thinking is. God will not think for you. He can help you think, but he cannot think for you. God will not cook a meal to give to your neighbor for you. He can help you cook a meal and help you serve that person with love, but he won't do that for you. God will not turn off the TV for you. God will not delete an app from your device for you. You must do it. You must put these things into practice. Don't ever blame God for your negligence. Do these things.

This is how we grow. We engage our minds. We think about these virtuous things. We occupy our minds with them, so much so, that there's no room, there's no bandwidth to entertain evil thoughts and ideas. And those virtuous things that we've learned and seen in others, do it yourself, put them into practice. Then you and I will grow to become more like Christ and be a blessing to others.

Let's pray.