

My Thought-Life in Response to His Great Love

Philippians 4:4-9 (text: 4:8)

17 October 2021, Reformed Church of Wainuiomata 10:30

(Put together by Pieter van Huyssteen with due acknowledgement)

Intro

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

Have you ever thought about the state of your thought-life?

Looking from God's perspective, are your & my thoughts expressing an awe-inspired thankfulness to God Triune for who He is and for the innumerable blessings He gives us – of which the greatest blessing is the gift of His Son, Jesus Christ!?

So, here is the question: What fills your & my thought-life every day – every minute?

You know, when I was two years old, Broadway brought out a movie – a musical – called “*The Most Happy Fella*.” In this movie there was a song with a very catchy tune – a song which for most of my childhood years was often heard in many a shopping mall or grocery store.

Now, if you are a bit like me – someone who is naturally drawn to catchy tunes – you will find it hard not to want to sing the words of this particular song.

And yet, time and time again, when this catchy song comes into my mind, I have to stop at one specific place!

Why?

Well, because any person who reverences God – yes, any person for whom Jesus Christ is Lord – simply cannot, with clear conscience, sing all the words of this song!

Here is how the song starts...

Standing on a corner watching all the girls go by....

Brother you don't know a nicer occupation

Matter of fact, neither do I

Than standing on a corner watching all the girls

Watching all the girls, watching all the girls go by

Well, so far someone could argue that it sounds still somewhat innocent – yes, up to this point in the song an unmarried man could perhaps still sing the words.

However, here are the words which the Christian man simply cannot sing in clear conscience ...

Standing on a corner giving all the girls the eye

Brother if you've got a rich imagination

Give it a whirl, give it a try...

Brother you can't go to jail for what you're thinking...¹

Did you hear that? “You can’t go to jail for what you’re *thinking!*”

Sure, no one could be brought before a *human* judge simply for what he/she was thinking!

However, what about the ultimate Judge – our Lord Jesus Christ? Yes, what about God?

I mean, does not God's Word say, “...*You perceive my thoughts from afar*”? And does it not say, “*Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O Lord*”?²

¹ <https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-d&q=standing+on+the+corner+watching+all+the+girls+go+by+-+lyrics>

² Ps 139:1-4, *O Lord, you have searched me and you know me.* ³ *You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar.* ⁴ *You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways.* *Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O Lord* (NIV 1984).

Also, cf. Ecclesiastes 12:14 *For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil* (NIV 1984; emphasis mine).

My brother & sister, it's not just the thoughts of a young man staring at girls, which can go in the wrong direction. No, (in Mark 7:21-22) our Lord Jesus gives the following list of evil thoughts: **sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice** (or wickedness), **deceit, lewdness** (or sensuality & self-indulgence), **envy, slander, arrogance** (or pride) **and folly** (or foolishness).³ Sadly, all of these often fill our thought-lives!

Why are ungodly thoughts wrong?

Well, because they grieve our holy God and Jesus Christ who gave His life for you/me; and because they make us unclean⁴ and can give birth to sinful actions.

Well, here is the main message of our text: Christian, does your thought-life agree with your profession of faith?

And here are the three main points of our sermon:

- Godly Thought-Life
- The Reason Why
- Practical Help

Godly Thought-Life

Phil. 4:8 lists six good/praiseworthy things with which the Christian should feed his/her thoughts. Here they are: things *true*; things *honourable*; things *right/just*; things *pure*; things *lovely*; and things *of good repute*.

So, having heard of these six good things, someone might say, "But, Pastor, where will I find examples of these six good things?"

Well, of course, even in this fallen world there are, by God's grace, still many good things to enjoy – music, books, architecture...⁵ – but the safest & purest source where you & I will find good things to fill our thought-lives, is & remains the Bible!

Also, cf. Hebrews 4:12 *For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart* (NIV 1984; emphasis mine).

³ Mark 7:20-23, *He went on: "What comes out of a man is what makes him 'unclean.' "*²¹ *For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery,* ²² *greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly.* ²³ *All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean.' "* (NIV 1984).

⁴ Cf. the previous footnote for Mark 7:23.

⁵ As for good things still found in this fallen world, cf. "For many who were raised in evangelical traditions, verse 8 ought to be a breath of fresh air. Contrary to what is often taught, implicitly if not explicitly, there is a place in Christian life for taking into serious account the best of the world in which we live, even though it may not be (perish the thought!) overtly Christian. Or to put it another way, it is decidedly not Paul's view that only what is explicitly Christian (be it literature, art, music, movies or whatever) is worth seeing or hearing. Truth and beauty are where you find them. But at all times the gospel is the ultimate paradigm for what is *true, noble* or *admirable*. Or perhaps you have not noticed that many truly great movies (e.g., *Spitfire Grill*) find their greatness because they tell our story (redemption through self-sacrifice), probably without even knowing it" (Fee, G. D. (1999). *Philippians* (Vol. 11, pp. 166–181). Westmont, IL: IVP Academic).

Also, "Paul's list of virtues in verse 8 assumes that the world contains many good qualities that merit the believer's consideration and affirmation. It also assumes that the pagan world has some notion of good and bad, right and wrong, duty and irresponsibility, beauty and ugliness, honor and shame. Elsewhere Paul speaks of Gentiles who have the requirements of God's law written on their hearts and says that occasionally they actually do these things (Rom. 2:14–15). He can also speak of the pagan authorities in government as God's agents for adjudicating right and wrong in society at large (13:1–7). Paul assumes, in other words, that absolute moral standards exist, that people other than Jews and Christians have affirmed them, and that the believer can benefit from pondering examples of them wherever they occur, even in the pagan world.... People other than Christians frequently recognize their validity, and when they do, Christians should support them, learn from them, and take comfort that what they acknowledge to be right on the basis of God's Word the rest of the world often acknowledges to be right on the basis of their own understanding of how the world and society function best.

And our text gives us six good things to fill our minds with.

So, let's briefly examine these six good things!

Firstly: Think about⁶ whatever is true:

Boys & girls, what is the source/origin of all things true – of the truth?

Is it not God!?

Look, is that not why the Bible tells us (e.g., in John 3:33) that **God is true**!?⁷

And is that not also why our Lord Jesus, as Son of God, revealed about Himself that He, too, is true!?⁸

Well, guess who embodies the exact opposite of the truth?

The devil! That's why the Bible tells us that the devil is the father (origin) of all lies!⁹

My brother & sister, if *God* is the Ultimate Truth – and unchangingly so – is it then not logic that also the *moral standards* which God has given us in His Word, are like their Giver – unchanging, fixed and forever truthful!?

See why it is vitally important that the person who *says* he/she loves God Triune will feed his mind with God's Word! The truth of God's Word must, as Ephesians 6 (verse 14) says, be part of the armour of the Christian "soldier!"¹⁰ Yes, the truth of God's word must be such an integral part of us that we will instantly be able to measure everything we encounter against the standard of God's Word – yes, also political correctness and pragmatism of our day & age which often assumes that love is equal to being tolerant, or that the truth is determined by whatever works well for the moment – accomplishing what *you* want, i.e., to give *you* momentary pleasure and happiness (e.g., when abortion becomes a convenient quick fix)!

Well, we have just had a brief look at the first of six good things (virtues) that verse 8 mentions. But can you see that the goal of our text is *not* to teach the kind of positive

Christians would be remiss, however, if they allowed the unbelieving world to guide their ethical decisions" (Thielman, F. (1995). *Philippians* (pp. 215–232). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House).

⁶ The Greek word for "think about" (at the end of verse 8) covers all six good things. It is the Greek word, *logizomai* (λογίζομαι) "to think about something in a detailed and logical manner—"to think about, to reason about, to ponder, reasoning" (Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains* (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 350). New York: United Bible Societies).

⁷ John 3:33 where John the Baptist says, "**He who has received His testimony has set his seal to this, that God is true**" (NASB 1995; emphasis mine).

Also cf. John 8:26 where our Lord Jesus says, "**I have many things to speak and to judge concerning you, but He who sent Me is true; and the things which I heard from Him, these I speak to the world**" (NASB 1995; emphasis mine).

Romans 3:4 where the Apostle Paul says, "**May it never be! Rather, let God be found true, though every man be found a liar, as it is written,**

"That You may be justified in Your words,

And prevail when You are judged"(NASB 1995; emphasis mine).

⁸ John 7:18, "**He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but He who is seeking the glory of the One who sent Him, He is true, and there is no unrighteousness in Him** (NASB 1995; emphasis mine).

Also cf. John 5:31-32, "**If I alone testify about Myself, My testimony is not true. There is another who testifies of Me, and I know that the testimony which He gives about Me is true**" (NASB 1995).

⁹ Cf. John 8:44 where our Lord Jesus says to those Jews who would not believe in Him, "**You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.**"

¹⁰ Ephesians 6:14, **Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist...**

thinking which some businessmen and those who cling to prosperity theology are teaching. After all, such teaching describes positive thinking from a secular point of view which has selfishness and self-enrichment as its goal!

In contrast, the goal of our text is to fill our mind with good things that will lead to actions by which you & I will promote the cause of our Lord Jesus and the Gospel on earth! Look, is that not, after all, why Paul wrote this letter to the Philippians? And is this not clear from Philippians 1:12 where Paul writes, “*I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me (i.e., Paul’s imprisonment) has really served to advance the gospel*”?¹¹

Truth – the first of six good things to fill our minds with!

Well, according to verse 8, here is the second virtue which should fill the Christian mind: **whatever is honourable!**

This word also means, “worthy of respect; of good character.”¹²

And you know what? This is the exact same word Paul uses in 1 Timothy to describe the character of elders,¹³ deacons,¹⁴ and all Christians¹⁵ – certainly, also husbands if they want to make it easier for their wives to respect them (Eph 5:33); and wives if they want to make it easier for their husbands to honour them (1 Peter 3:7).

Question: How can one become a person of honourable/respected character?

Is it not only when one fills your mind with honourable things – not with frivolity or silliness; and not with words, books, movies and songs that treat life as a perpetual joke!

Once when I met with a family three days before the funeral of their mother & mother-in-law so that I could go with them through the order of the funeral service, the rest of the family & I had to, every now & then, wait for the one son-in-law (a man in his mid-forties) to finish his silly comments and jokes by which he thought he was cute/cool. However, every time he opened his mouth, he only revealed his immaturity – and how far he lived from Christ!

But Christians will take their lives seriously and live in line with Psalm 90:12, “... **teach us to number our days, that we may present to You a heart of wisdom.**”¹⁶

Of course, this does not mean that Christians are forbidden to appreciate clean humour! No, it just means that with their thinking and actions, Christians will send a clear message to the world – the message that life is short and that, one day (perhaps even soon), all people *will* stand before the Holy God of heaven and earth!

All things honourable – the second good thing.

¹¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Php 1:12). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

¹² The Greek word is, *semna*, which is the neuter plural of *semnos* (σεμνός): “pertaining to appropriate, befitting behavior and implying dignity and respect—‘honorable, worthy of respect, of good character.’ διακόνους ὡσαύτως σεμνούς ‘helpers should be of good character’ or ‘deacons ...’ 1 Tm 3:8” (Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). [Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains](#) (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 747). New York: United Bible Societies).

¹³ Cf. 1 Tim 3:4 **He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity** (NASB 1995; emphasis mine)

¹⁴ Cf. 1 Tim 3:8 **Deacons likewise must be men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain** (NASB 1995; emphasis mine).

¹⁵ Cf. 1 Tim 2:1-2 (especially v.2), **First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity** (NASB 1995; emphasis mine)

¹⁶ NASB 1995.

Well, here is the third good thing which should fill the Christian mind: ***whatever is right (or righteous or just).***¹⁷

My brother & sister, the person who reverences God and loves the Lord Jesus, is the one who will often in awe meditate on (fill his thought-life with) the righteous acts of God;¹⁸ and is also the person whose righteous thoughts will come out in righteous actions. I mean, does not 1 John 3:7 say, “... ***the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He (God/Christ) is righteous***”?¹⁹

So, the employer whose thought-life is filled with righteousness, is the one who treats his workers with righteousness & fairness knowing that he also has a Master in heaven (Col 4:1).

And, so too, will be the accountant who truly loves the Lord – he will do his bookkeeping justly & in all righteousness.

So, too, the worker whose boss has gone away for a week or two.

Well, our text gives a fourth good thing which should fill the Christian’s mind – i.e., ***whatever is pure***

Paul’s first readers, the Philippians, lived smack in the middle of pagans, many of whom lived unchaste lives and who thought little of the moral laws given by God. So, see why Paul exhorted the people of the fledgeling Philippian church to fill their minds with whatever is pure and holy?²⁰

Well, boys & girls (brothers & sisters), are not you & I also surrounded by a pagan world which very vividly broadcasts its way of life on TV and the social media?

So, also to us our text says, “Don’t fill your mind with rubbish! Fill your mind with whatever is pure & holy!”

I mean, if Christ comes tonight (or calls us home tonight), how does He want to find us? Does He not want to find us as His pure/holy “bride”?²¹

Indeed, everyone who hopes to see the Lord Jesus, will want to purify him/herself, just as Jesus is pure!²²

¹⁷ The Greek word, *dikaïos* (δικαίος) means all these things (cf. e.g., Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000). *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature* (3rd ed., p. 246). Chicago: University of Chicago Press).

¹⁸ Cf. Revelation 15:3 *And they sang the song of Moses, the bond-servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, “Great and marvelous are Your works, O Lord God, the Almighty; Righteous and true are Your ways, King of the nations!”*

For God’s righteousness, also cf. Romans 3:25-26, *God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—²⁶ he did it to demonstrate his justice (righteousness) at the present time, so as to be just (righteous) and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus* (NIV 1984).

¹⁹ Also cf. 1 John 2:29, *If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him.*

²⁰ Cf. Phil. 3:18-19, *For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things* (NASB 1995).

Also cf. Eph. 5:7-8 *Therefore do not be partakers with them; for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light* (NASB 1995)

²¹ Cf. 2 Cor. 11:2 “*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 virgin*” (NASB 1995)

²² 1 John 3:2-3, “*Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure*” (NASB 1995; emphasis mine).

Well, in the second-last place, our text exhorts us to fill our minds with *whatever is lovely/pleasing* – literally: with that which works towards love;²³ that which breathes and evokes love in others²⁴ – of course, love on *God's* terms and for *His* glory!

Well, lastly, our text says that things of good repute should fill our thought-life.

Here we think of a person who, in his/her mind, thinks of ways in which he/she can behave (conduct him/herself)²⁵ in a way that will be commendable – not so much for the benefit of the person him/herself, but for the furtherance of the Gospel of Christ!

And so, how does the Apostle Paul sum up his God-given message?

Well, in the last part of v.8, he exhorts the Philippians (and you & me) to fill our thought lives with anything which is excellent and praiseworthy!

Then, from where Paul is sitting in that Roman jail, not knowing whether he would ever again see the Philippians in person, he, as their pastor & spiritual leader, holds himself humbly as an example to the Philippians. So, he says (in v.9), “*Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice.*”²⁶

See? Good thought-life will give birth to good practice!

The Reason Why (I will Seek a Godly Thought-Life)

My brother & sister (boys & girls), who is the person who will seek a God-honouring thought-life? Is it the person who strives in own strength to try and make him/herself right with God?

No!

The person who seeks a God-honouring thought-life is the one who, by the inworking of God's Holy Spirit, has been born again – yes, is the person whose heart has been moved by the mind-bending way in which God did not spare His very own Son, but gave Him over to pain & God-forsakenness for the salvation of His loved ones!

Is that you?

If so, then, by God's grace, you have received Jesus not only as your Saviour – no, but you have made Him also your Lord/Master – also of your thought-life! Yes, then your thought-life will be in sync with the thought-life of Christ – or as the Apostle Paul says, “You will *have the mind of Christ*” (1 Cor. 2:16),²⁷ which means that, in your heart of hearts, you will also love to do what 2 Cor. 10:5 says, “...*take every thought captive to make it obedient to Christ.*”²⁸ Yes, you will (as

²³ After all, the word *prophilēs* (προσφιλής), which, in the New Testament, appears only here, is made up of two parts: *pros* (to/towards) and *philēs* (related to *philēō* – to like/love). That's why the Greek dictionary explains this word as “**pertaining to causing pleasure or delight, pleasing, agreeable, lovely, amiable...**” (Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000). [*A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature*](#) (3rd ed., p. 886). Chicago: University of Chicago Press).

²⁴ Hendriksen explains: “That which is *lovely, amiable, pleasing*, breathes love and evokes love” (Hendriksen, W. 2004. Exposition of Philippians (In: Hendriksen, W. ed. New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI : Baker Book House. p.193).

²⁵ “*Admirable*, although not quite a synonym of *lovely*, belongs to the same general category of “virtues.” Rather than referring to a virtue in the moral sense, it represents the kind of conduct that is worth considering because it is well spoken of by people in general” (Fee, G. D. (1999). [*Philippians*](#) (Vol. 11, pp. 166–181). Westmont, IL: IVP Academic).

²⁶ [*The Holy Bible: New International Version*](#). (1984). (Php 4:9). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

²⁷ 1 Cor. 2:15-16, *The spiritual man makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man's judgment:*

¹⁶ “*For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?*”

But we have the mind of Christ (NIV 1984; emphasis mine).

²⁸ 2 Cor.10:5, *We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ* (NIV 1984; emphasis mine).

Romans 12:2 says) love to “*be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove... that which is good and acceptable and perfect.*”

Perhaps you say, “But, Pastor, how will I succeed in having a God-honouring thought-life?” “After all, evil – and the evil one – is all around us in this world!” “It’s everywhere – in our neighbourhoods, on TV in my lounge, in the social media in my hand!” “Pastor, sometimes, even without my doing, temptation just comes my way!”

Well, I still love the old saying: “You cannot prevent a bird from flying over your head, but you can stop it from making its nest in your hair!” You can switch to another TV channel; you can change to another screen on your cell phone!

Look, does not James 4:7 say a similar thing: “...*Resist the devil and he will flee from you*”?²⁹

Perhaps you ask, “But, what can I use to help me?”

Well, that brings us to the last (short) point in this sermon...

Practical Help

There are two things that the person who really loves the Lord can do to help him keep his thought-life healthy, i.e., 1) making good things enter your mind, and 2) blocking bad things from entering your mind.

You see, if you only look after making good things enter your mind, yet, at the same time, you don’t prevent bad things from slipping in, then you are like the person who, half the time, puts unhealthy food into his body, thinking that the few good things that he plans on eating tomorrow, should fix the problem.

Well, don’t we often commit the same sin regarding our thought-life (mind)?

My brother & sister (young people), *it is impossible for any Christian who spends the bulk of his evenings, month after month, week after week, day in and day out watching the major TV networks or contemporary videos, to have a Christian mind.*³⁰

But, in contrast, God’s Word commands, “*Above all else, guard (watch over) your heart (mind or thought-life), for it is the wellspring of life!*”³¹

So, here’s a question: What is the right “pasture” for the Christian mind to “graze” in?³²

Well, as our text explains: Anything which is a matter of moral and spiritual excellence.

And so, of real practical help is God’s Word! The Christian should read God’s Word daily!

As someone once said, “You cannot be profoundly influenced by that which you do not know.”³³

It is through Bible reading that we gain memory verses that speak to the problems we struggle with!

And unless we have God’s Word well-established in our thought-life, we cannot use it in the hour of temptation! Look, is not Jesus our example there where He, in temptation’s hour, was able to quote Bible verses which He (according to His human nature) had memorised since He was a child!?³⁴

²⁹ [*New American Standard Bible: 1995 update*](#). (1995). (Jas 4:7). La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

³⁰ True words of Steven J. Cole. Lesson 25: The Christian’s Thought Life (Philippians 4:8) (<https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-25-christian-s-thought-life-philippians-48>).

³¹ [*The Holy Bible: New International Version*](#). (1984). (Pr 4:23). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

³² Great symbolism borrowed from Hendriksen (ibid:199).

³³ Kent Hughes (apud Cole, ibid)

³⁴ Cf. Matt. 4:1-11

Then, apart from regular Bible reading, the Christian can also expose his mind to the sermons of Godly men – yes, the sermons & commentaries of e.g., John Calvin, Jonathan Edwards, Chares Spurgeon, Matthew Henry, J.C Ryle, Martyn Lloyd Jones, R.C. Sproul and others! I mean, these preachers walked with God. So, they can feed your soul!

If you don't like reading (or don't have the time), you could listen to sermons via the Internet – even on your cell phone (as I often do when I walk my dog).

Lastly, you could also listen to wholesome music – like the great psalms and hymns of faith. I mean, our green Sing-to-the-Lord psalter/hymnal gives eight pages filled with the names of people who have composed psalms and hymns to teach sound theology to many who were literate or even illiterate. And most of these can be heard on YouTube on your laptop, tablet or smartphone!

My brother & sister, granted, as that Broadway song said, “You can't go to jail for what you're thinking.” However, you & I (and all people) will one day come to stand before the Judge of heaven & earth, who knows our every thought!

Do you want to stand before your Saviour “dirty” and “unkempt” because of your bad thought-life? Or would you love to stand before Him as His beautiful and well-adorned bride!?

AMEN (2,856 words, excluding footnotes)