

Principles for Stability in Your Christian Life Pt 7

Phil 4:1-9

⁸ Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things *are* noble, whatever things *are* just, whatever things *are* pure, whatever things *are* lovely, whatever things *are* of good report, if *there is* any virtue and if *there is* anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things. ⁹ The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.

Introduction:

You don't have to be an astute observer of the evangelical scene to notice the unrelenting barrage of outlandish ideas, philosophies, and programs. Never in the history of the church has so much innovation met with so little critical thinking.

Giving a thoughtful biblical response becomes harder and harder all the time. Merely sorting through all the evangelical trends and recognizing which of these novelties really represent dangerous threats to the health and harmony of the church is challenging enough. Effectively answering the huge smorgasbord of accompanying errors poses an even greater dilemma. New errors sometimes seem to multiply faster than the previous ones can be answered.

To sort it all out in a godly way, cutting a straight path through the wreckage of evangelicalism, several old-fashioned, Christlike virtues are absolutely essential: biblical discernment, wisdom, fortitude, determination, endurance, skill in handling Scripture, strong convictions,

the ability to speak candidly without waffling, and a willingness to enter into conflict.

Let's be honest: those are not qualities the contemporary evangelical movement has cultivated. In fact, the exact opposite is true. Consider the values and motives that prompt postmodern evangelicals to do the things they do. The larger evangelical movement today is obsessed with opinion polls, brand identity, market research, merchandizing schemes, innovative strategies, and numerical growth. Evangelicals are also preoccupied with matters such as their image before the general public and before the academic world, their clout in the political arena, their portrayal by the media, and similar shallow, self-centered matters.

The PR-driven church. Somewhere along the line, evangelicals bought the lie that the Great Commission is a marketing mandate. The leading strategists for church growth today are therefore all pollsters and public relations managers. In the words of Rick Warren, "If you want to advertise your church to the unchurched, you must learn to think and speak like they do." [Rick Warren, *The Purpose-Driven Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995) 189]

Runaway pragmatism and trivial pursuit. The most compelling question in the minds and on the lips of many pastors today is not "What's true?" but rather "What works?" Evangelicals these days care less about theology than they do about *methodology*. Truth has taken a backseat to more pragmatic concerns. When a person is trying hard to customize one's message to meet the "felt needs" of one's audience, earnestly contending for the faith is out of the question.

That mentality is precisely what Paul warned against in [Ephesians 4:14](#). It has left evangelical Christians dangerously exposed to trickery, deceitfulness, and unsound doctrine. It has also left them completely unequipped to practice any degree of true biblical discernment.

Trivializing Truth

None other than National Public Radio recently lamented the growing trivialization of values in American society. In an NPR web article entitled, "Trivialization Nation" (Feb. 2010) Linton Weeks writes, "The wide-spread trivialization of meaningful things is indisputable. Sound bites and silliness reign supreme. . . . Perhaps the tendency to trivialize is born of bandwagonism or laziness. . . . Trivializing large ideals is easier than living up to them. And it's less scary."²⁵

Elsewhere, the article cited an interview with the president of Harvard, Drew Faust, in which she was asked to respond to the dumbing down of American culture. "I worry about attention span," Faust said, "because people will not listen to more than a couple of sentences or read more than a couple of sentences. Does everything have to be a sound bite? Is everything to be digested into something brief? And aren't there complicated ideas that we ought to have the patience to give our attention to?"²⁶

One novelist-turned-blogger provides firsthand testimony of that trivialization in his own experience. He writes: "This is, I think, the real danger of social media and Twitter. . . . It changes the way I process information. Or to be more precise, I no longer process information—I merely consume it. I speed read hundreds of bits of articles a day, absorbing lots of information, but rarely actually thinking about it. . . . The difficult thoughts, the ambivalent thoughts, the repulsive thoughts, the thoughts too complicated to be reduced to a tweet. They are labeled low priority and sent to the back office of my mind."²⁷

Geoff Dyer, writing in *The Guardian*, echoes that concern: "Sometimes I think my ability to concentrate is being nibbled away by the internet; other times I think it's being gulped down in huge, Jaws-shaped chunks."²⁸ A CNBC article entitled, "Is Twitter Making You Stupid?" concludes with this sobering assessment: "It seems that we've managed, in the words of playwright Richard Foreman . . . to transform ourselves into 'pancake people'—spread wide and thin as we connect with that vast network of information accessed by the mere touch of a button."²⁹

While scientists and social critics debate the effects of social media on how we think, one thing remains clear: Christians must guard themselves against becoming theological pancakes. Thanks to the market-driven methodologies of the seeker-sensitive movement, the dumbing down of doctrine has characterized American evangelicalism for decades. In many ways, sites like Twitter and Facebook only exacerbate that problem because they provide a venue in which reductionism and extreme brevity simultaneously coincide with information overload and infinite distraction.

But not every theological truth can be adequately summarized in just a phrase or two. And not every debate can be resolved in just one blog article. Many doctrines require extended time and thought to properly process. Mature believers reflect deeply on the things of God and the truths of His Word.

They are not a mile wide and an inch deep. Instead their lives are marked by rich devotion, focused study, prolonged prayer, and careful meditation. Cultivating those kinds of spiritual disciplines takes time and effort—traits that are rarely prized in the information age.

In light of that, believers must not allow blogs, tweets, and status updates to become their *primary* source of theological education or spiritual input. If they do, they will inevitably become doctrinally shallow and spiritually malnourished.

God's Word repeatedly calls us to use our minds wisely. We are to think on things that are right and true (**Phil. 4:8**) as we test all things carefully (**1 Thess. 5:21**) and bring every thought captive to the obedience of Christ (**2 Cor. 10:5**). Our minds are to be renewed (**Rom. 12:2**) as we allow the Word of Christ to dwell in us richly (**Col. 3:16**). We are to be sober-minded (**1 Cor. 15:34**) as we set our minds on things above (**Col. 3:2**) and prepare them for action (**1 Pet. 1:13**).

Clearly, God cares how we think and what we think about. Insofar as social media websites cultivate the trivialization of profound truths, while simultaneously fostering shorter attention spans, believers would do well to proceed carefully.

Review

I. Pursue Harmony and Peace

II. Maintain a Spirit of Joy

III. Cultivate Humility

IV. Trust God

V. Thankful Prayer

Lesson:

VI. Godly Thinking

⁸ Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things *are* noble, whatever things *are* just, whatever things *are* pure, whatever things *are* lovely, whatever things *are* of good report, if *there is* any virtue and if *there is* anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.

Finally (3062) (**loipon**) means literally “for the rest” or “for what remains” and in the present context means “as to what remains to be said.” This is Paul's second use of **loipon** in this letter ([Php 3:1](#)-see **note Philipians 3:1**). Therefore, obviously **loipon** does not always imply one is drawing to a close but that there is a transition in subject matter.

As Paul draws to the conclusion of his letter, in this verse he deals with the greatest conflict that every believer encounters - the battle for the control our minds.

Solomon recognized this age long conflict when he wrote...

Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life. ([Proverbs 4:23](#))

Believers are in a war for their minds, the world system continually bombarding them using every "weapon" at its disposal - books, magazines, billboards, television, movies, internet, etc. The goal of the anti-god world system is to control our actions by first controlling our minds. We've all heard the axiom "The medium is the message" but the real message is that the medium seeks to seduce our minds into its anti-god way of thinking,

Dwight Pentecost offers a practical thought regarding this verse noting that...

The greatest area of sin in the believer's life is not the area of actions but the area of thought. There is a whole classification of sins that we would have to call sins of the mind. What was the first sin of Lucifer? It was pride. What is that? A sin of the mind. What is lust? A sin of the mind. What is covetousness? A sin of the mind. Greed? A sin of the mind. Suspicion? A sin of the mind. Discouragement? A sin of the mind. We could go on and on. Those sins are more real to the child of God than such sins as adultery and murder and theft. That is a testimony to the fact that there is a warfare going on. Satan is attacking the mind. Therefore this word of the

Apostle Paul concerning the use we make of our minds is so relevant to us today: meditate, ruminate, dwell on these things. (Pentecost, J. D. *The Joy of Living: A study of Philippians*. Kregel Publications)

Mark Twain wrote,

What a wee little part of a person's life are his acts and his words! His real life is led in his head, and is known to none but himself. All day long, the mill of his brain is grinding, and his thoughts, not those other things, are his history. (Reader's Digest [1/93], p. 155).

Jonathan Edwards put it this way:

The ideas and images in men's minds are the invisible powers that constantly govern them

Jesus said,

“That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man” ([Mark 7:20, 21, 22, 23](#)).

WHAT PAUL IS NOT TEACHING: THE POWER OF POSITIVE THINKING.

I need to focus on this for a moment because the Christian world has been infiltrated with the false

teaching of “positive thinking,” popularized by Norman Vincent Peale and, with only slight variations, by Peale’s protege, Robert Schuller. If you are at all familiar with the teachings of these men, you know that they are not Christian in any orthodox sense of the term, even though they both have been welcomed into evangelical circles. Through their influence, the idea has crept into the American church that it is wrong ever to be negative or critical. This has resulted in the loss of discernment...

WHAT PAUL IS TEACHING: THE CHRISTIAN’S THOUGHT LIFE SHOULD BE FOCUSED ON THE GREAT TRUTHS OF SCRIPTURE.

Even though Scripture is not specifically mentioned, it is assumed, because it is the only source for knowing what is true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, and of good repute. (Read his excellent message [Philippians 4:8 The Christian's Thought Life](#))

Whatever is true - true as to fact. What is true denotes the actuality of something.

True (227) (**alethes**) is that which conforms to reality. In the final analysis whatever God says on any given subject is **true**! The unchanging God and His unchanging holy Word is the final test for truth.

Dr. Walter Cavert reported a survey on worry that indicated that only 8% of the things people worried about were legitimate matters of concern (**true**)! The other 92% were either imaginary, never happened, or involved matters over which the people had no control anyway. Satan is the antithesis of truth for he is the father of lies ([Jn 8:44](#)), and he seeks to corrupt our minds with his

lies and deception ([2Cor 11:3](#)). His mantra remains unchanged after 5000 years - "*Hath God really said?*" ([Genesis 3:1ff](#)).

The Holy Spirit sanctifies our mind through God's truth, His Word...

"Sanctify them in the **truth**; Thy word is **truth**. ([Jn 17:17](#))

MacArthur has some insightful comments on those things that are "**true**":

People no longer ask "Is it **true**?" but "**Does it work?**" and "**How will it make me feel?**" Those latter two questions serve as a working definition of truth in our society that rejects the concept of absolute divine truth. Truth is whatever works and produces positive emotions. Sadly, such pragmatism and emotionalism has crept even into theology. The church is often more concerned about whether something will be divisive or offensive than whether it is biblically true...Too many people go to church not to think or 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...Salvation involves the transformation of the mind. In [Romans 8:5](#) (**note**) Paul writes,

Those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh."

Unsaved, fleshly people have an unsaved, fleshly mind-set. They think as fallen, unredeemed people. On the other hand,

“those who are according to the Spirit [set their minds on] the things of the Spirit.”

Their renewed minds are focused on spiritual truth. Consequently,

“the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace” (Romans 8:6 **note**)....

Sow a thought, reap an action.

Sow an action, reap a habit.

Sow a habit, reap a character.

Sow a character, reap a destiny!

WHATEVER IS HONORABLE: hosa semna: ([Acts 6:3](#); [Ro12:17](#); [13:13](#); [2Co 8:21](#); [13:7](#); [1Th 4:12](#); [1Ti 2:2](#); [3:4,8,11](#); [Titus 2:2,7](#); [Titus 3:14](#); [Heb 13:18](#); [1Pe 2:12](#))

Honorable (4586) (**semnos**) means worthy of respect or entitled to honor. It is that which inspires reverence or awe. It describes those things which are worthy, venerable, august, noble. The idea pertains to whatever evokes special respect.

Semnos is used only 4 times in the NT, here in [Philippians 4:8](#) and in the following passages all describing an attribute of a distinct group of people...

1 Timothy 3:8 Deacons likewise must be men of **dignity** (semnos), not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain,

1 Timothy 3:11 Women must likewise be **dignified**, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things.

Titus 2:2 (note) Older men are to be temperate, **dignified**, sensible, sound in faith, in love, in perseverance.

Pastor Cole write that honorable...

This means that Christians are to take life seriously. We are not to be silly goof-offs, who treat life as a perpetual joke. We live in light of eternity, keeping in mind the uncertainty of this short life and the reality of heaven and hell. This doesn't mean that we can't appreciate clean humor. But our overall tenor should communicate to a lost world that they must stand before a holy God someday soon. Think on these reverent themes. (Read his excellent message [Philippians 4:8 The Christian's Thought Life](#))

Ask: Does that to which you are giving your attention have honest value? Does it have the dignity of holiness upon it?

WHATEVER IS RIGHT: hosa dikaia: ([Ge 18:19](#); [Dt 16:20](#); [2Sa 23:3](#); [Ps 82:2](#); [Pr 11:1](#); [16:11](#); [20:7](#); [Isa 26:7](#); [Mk 6:20](#); [Lk 2:25](#); [23:50](#); [Acts 10:22](#); [Titus 1:8](#))

Right (1342) (**dikaios**) refers to that which conforms to the perfect standard of God's righteousness. We know from Romans that the "good works" that God requires (they are "right") do not come from our good intentions, but originate out of faith that

obeys. **Dikaios** describes whatever is in perfect harmony with God's eternal, unchanging standards, as revealed in Scripture.

he **NAS** translates **dikaios** as innocent(1), just(6), justice(1), right(6), **righteous**(45), righteous man(8), righteous Man(1), righteous man's(1), righteous men(2), righteous one(1), Righteous One(3), righteous persons(1), what is right(1), who is righteous(1).

Ask: Does that to which you are giving your mind conform to the holiness of God? Is it intrinsically righteous, or is it tainted, shady?

WHATEVER IS PURE: hosa hagna: ([1Ti 4:12](#); [5:2](#); [Titus 2:14](#); [Jas 1:27](#); [3:17](#); [2Pe 3:1](#); [1Jn 3:3](#))

Pure (53) (**hagnos**) is that which is free from defilement, stainless, that which will not contaminate, that which is "morally and inwardly" pure. The word refers to ceremonial purity, but also to the moral purity that is pictured by the ceremonial. It especially means keeping our bodies undefiled by abstaining from sexual sins (see [2Cor 11:2](#); [1Ti 5:22](#); [Titus 2:5-note](#); [James 3:17](#); [1Pe 3:2-note](#); [1 John 3:3](#)). The saints then, as now, were constantly attacked by temptations to sexual impurity ([Ep 4:17](#), [18](#), [19](#), [20](#), [21](#), [22](#), [23](#), [24](#)-see notes [Ep 4:17-19](#); [20-22](#); [23-24](#)). Paul gives a strong warning to every saint...

do not let immorality or any impurity or greed even **be named** (**present imperative** commanding this to be their habitual practice = to not to even pronounce the name! Or to stop a practice already in existence.) among you, as is proper among saints; 4 and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. 5 For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in

the kingdom of Christ and God. 6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. 7 Therefore do not be partakers with them; 8 for you were formerly darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light 9 (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth), 10 trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. ([Ep 5:3](#), [4](#), [5](#), [6](#), [7](#), [8](#), [9](#), [10](#))

The **NAS** renders **hagnos** as chaste(1), free from sin(1), innocent(1), pure(5).

Ask: Will it defile or is it intrinsically pure? Will it corrupt your thinking if you give attention to it? Will it stand the scrutiny of God?

WHATEVER IS LOVELY: hosa prosphile: ([2Sa 1:23](#); [Song 5:16](#); [1Co 13:1-13](#); [1Pe 4:8](#))

Lovely (4375) (**prosphile** is a relationship word derived from **pros** = towards + **philes** = friend) refers to that conduct which is dear to someone. It is that conduct which is pleasing in its motive and actions towards others. **Lovely** has the idea of that which is admirable or agreeable to behold or consider. Who is the most lovely One ever to live? Jesus of course and it follows that we should think often of what He has done for us, is doing now at the right hand of the Father and will do in the future. Maranatha.

Barclay adds that...

Winsome is the best translation of all. The Greek is *prosphile*, and it might be paraphrased as that which calls forth love. There are those whose minds are so set on vengeance and punishment that they call forth bitterness and fear in others. There are those whose

minds are so set on criticism and rebuke that they call forth resentment in others. The mind of the Christian is set on the lovely things—kindness, sympathy, forbearance—so he is a winsome person, whom to see is to love. (ibid)

Ask: Will this thing produce concord and rest and peace: Or will giving attention to this thing produce strife either within you or between you and another brother? If the former, then as the saying goes "hold that thought"! If the latter, than cast it aside.

WHATEVER IS OF GOOD REPUTE: hosa euphema: ([Acts 6:3](#); [10:22](#); [22:12](#); [Col 4:5](#); [1Th 5:22](#); [1Ti 3:7](#); [5:10](#); [Heb 11:2](#))

Good repute (2163) (**euphemos** is from **eu** = well, good + **pheme** = rumor, fame; English = euphemism) and refers to that which is well-spoken of, praiseworthy, laudable, highly regarded or well thought of. It is something or someone that deservedly enjoys a good reputation.

Ask: Are we concentrating on the good things we see in others or are we dwelling on their faults and shortcomings?

No Christian can afford to waste "mind power" on thoughts that tear him down or that would tear others down if these thoughts were shared. The believer must major on the high and noble thoughts especially as revealed in the pure milk of God's word and not dwell upon the base thoughts of this corrupt world.

IF THERE IS ANY EXCELLENCE: ei tis arete: ([Ru 3:11](#); [Pr 12:4](#); [31:10,29](#); [2Pe 1:3,4](#))

Note the change in sentence structure introduced by "if". These last two qualities are more generic qualities and serve to sum up the preceding qualities.

Excellence (703) (**arete**) (Click in depth study) refers to any preeminence (moral, intellectual, military). **Arete** is a term denoting consummate 'excellence' or 'merit' within a social context. To the Greek philosophers, it meant "the fulfillment of a thing." **Arete** came to mean quality of life which made someone or something stand out as excellent.

Worthy of praise (1868) (**epainos** from **epí** = upon + **aínos** = praise) is literally "praise upon" and denotes commendation, praise, or approbation (an act of formally or officially approving). It means something which is worthy of being commended. The word can describe the act of expressing admiration or approval, praise, approval, recognition. In the present context **epainos** describes a thing that is praiseworthy or something that deserves to be praised. So when that thought comes into your mind ask "Is it praiseworthy?" Then reflect upon it.

Detzler writes that **epainos** is...

Used sparingly in the Scriptures, the basic meaning of this word is "applause." It speaks of expressed approval or public recognition. Usually this praise was addressed to an individual or to an entire community. (Detzler, Wayne E: New Testament Words in Today's Language. Victor. 1986)

LET YOUR MIND DWELL (meditate, ponder, continually take an inventory) **ON THESE THINGS: tauta logizesthe (2PPMM):** ([Lk 16:15](#); [1Th 5:21](#); [1Jn 4:1](#)) (Macarthur on Php 4:8 Godly Thinking)

Let your Mind Dwell (3049) (**logizomai** from **lógos** = reason, word, account) (English ~ logarithm) means to reckon, compute, calculate, to take into account, to deliberate, and to weigh. **Logizomai** refers to a process of careful study or reasoning which results in the arriving at a conclusion. **Logizomai** conveys the idea of calculating or estimating. The idea is to think about something in a detailed and logical manner.

Robertson says it means a “deliberate and prolonged contemplation as if one is weighing a mathematical problem.”

Ralph P. Martin says think about these things with a view to doing them, allowing them "to shape your conduct”.

The **present tense** and **imperative mood** commands a continuous action, a call to a spiritual discipline for the purpose of godliness for as a man or woman thinks in their heart so they are ([Pr 23:7](#), cf [Mt 15:18, 19](#)).

The Psalmist gives sage advice

I will set no worthless thing before my eyes; I hate the work of those who fall away; It shall not fasten its grip on me. ([Psalm 101:3](#))

Spurgeon comments...

I will neither delight in it, aim at it or endure it. If I have wickedness brought before me by others I will turn away from it, I will not gaze upon it with pleasure.

Jesus made it very clear that we should do whatever it takes, declaring that...

if your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out, and throw it from you; for it is better for you that one of the parts of your body perish, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off, and throw it from you; for it is better for you that one of the parts of your body perish, than for your whole body to go into hell. (See **notes Matthew 5:29; 30**)

**Noble thinking produces noble living.
High thinking produces high living.
Holy thinking produces holy living.**

And so Paul says let this mindset be your lifestyle. Continually think about these things in a detailed and logical manner!

I am resolved no longer to linger,
Charmed by the world's delight,
Things that are higher, things that are nobler,
These have allured my sight.

I will hasten to Him, hasten so glad and free;
Jesus, greatest, highest, I will come to Thee.
I will hasten, hasten to Him, hasten so glad and free;
Jesus, Jesus, greatest, highest, I will come to Thee
(Palmer Hartsough)

The **middle voice** is reflexive which means that you yourself are to continually initiate this action and participate in the effects or results thereof. It is also worth noting that in the preceding verse (**Php 4:7**) Paul had assured the saints that God would guard their hearts and mind in Christ Jesus. In this verse Paul is emphasizing that the saints themselves have a responsibility in the matter. God

does not garrison the thought-life of a man who does not want it to be kept pure.

As Robertson says

We are responsible for our thoughts and can hold them to high and holy ideals.

**Spiritual stability is a product of how we think
Proper thinking is not optional for saints.**

Former UN Secretary General **Charles Malik** speaking to a distinguished audience at the dedication of the Billy Graham Center at Wheaton College declared...

Believe me, my friends, the mind today is in profound trouble, perhaps more than ever before. How to order the mind on sound Christian principles, at the heart of where it is formed and informed, is one of the ... greatest themes that can be considered.”

Dwight Pentecost offers a practical summary of this verse...

God’s standard for His children is that we should sit in judgment upon every thought that flickers through our minds. If it cannot pass the test of ringing true and being of honest worth, righteous, incorruptible, and attractive, it is to be rejected and repudiated. If you introduce one drop of contaminated water into a pitcher of cool water, the cool, refreshing, pure water will not purify that defilement, but the defilement will corrupt the pure; so these thoughts will contaminate your mind. Satan wants to turn your mind into a cesspool and have your mind occupied with that which ultimately must corrupt, defile, and spoil the whole body, distort the life, and produce

sin. The battle is not first in the field of action; it is in the field of thought. Transport yourself to the pasture, consider the cow chewing her cud, and learn that lesson from nature that the psalmist learned. Your delight must be in the Word of God, and in His Word you must chew your cud day and night. If the battle is lost, it is lost because you do not meditate on “ these things.” (Pentecost, J. D. *The Joy of Living: A study of Philippians*. Kregel Publications)

To obey what Paul is saying, we must exercise control over our thought life. This involves at least five things:

1. We need the mind of Christ through conversion.

Before a person knows Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, he has a depraved mind (Ro 1;28-note). He lives in the lusts of his flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind (Eph 2:3-note). God must supernaturally raise us from our state of being dead in our trespasses and sins (see note Ephesians 2:1) and impart to us a new nature that is able to obey Him (Eph 5:22, 23, 24-see notes Eph 4:22; 23; 24). Paul says that

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. However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him (Ro 8:7, 8, 9 - see notes Ro 8:7; 8; 9).

As he goes on to explain, the Holy Spirit gives us the power to put to death the deeds of the flesh and to live in obedience to God.

2. We must clean out and block out sources for sinful thoughts.

We cannot have a pure thought life without first ridding ourselves of things which defile us. It would be like trying to clean yourself while you're lying in a mud hole. The first step is to get out of the mud and get to a source of soap and water. If we allow things into our lives which promote sensuality, greed, sexual impurity, crude language, violence, hatred, love of self, or anything else not pleasing to God, we cannot grow in holiness.

I agree with **Pastor Kent Hughes**, who in his book, *Disciplines of a Godly Man* (Crossway Books, p. 75 or Logos) writes,

I am aware of the wise warnings against using words like 'all,' 'every,' and 'always' in what I say. Absolutizing one's pronouncements is dangerous. But I'm going to do it anyway. Here it is: ***It is impossible for any Christian who spends the bulk of his evenings, month after month, week upon week, day in and day out watching the major TV networks or contemporary videos to have a Christian mind.*** This is ***always*** true of all Christians in every situation!" (emphasis his).

Amen! It needs to be said: You ***will not be a godly person*** if you do not control the TV, videos, movies, music, magazines, books, and even the radio programs you take in. If something is polluting you or tempting you, get rid of it and make plans to avoid it!

3. Take in God's Word from every source.

Read it daily. If you're not a reader, listen to it on tape. You have no excuses for not saturating your mind with Scripture. As Kent Hughes also says,

You cannot be profoundly influenced by that which you do not know (p. 77).

I cannot encourage you enough to memorize verses that relate to problems you struggle with. (related resource [Memorizing His Word](#)) Unless the Word is in your heart, God cannot use it when you are tempted (see Jesus' example in fending off temptation, [Mt 4:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10,11](#)). You do not need to read the newspaper every day, but you desperately need to read your Bible every day! It's like a daily shower--it cleanses off the dirt of the world ([Eph 5:26-note](#)).

4. Expose your mind to the teaching and examples of the great Christians down through history. (See related resource [Christian Biography](#))

Listen to and read sermons from godly men. The sermons and commentaries of John Calvin, Jonathan Edwards, Charles Spurgeon, J. C. Ryle, Martyn Lloyd-Jones, and other giants of the faith are available in print. (**Ed:** Listen to John Piper's excellent biographies of these men at [Biographies](#)) Read the biographies of these and other godly men and women. With a few exceptions, avoid most of the modern Christian best sellers, and spend your time reading the works that have stood the test of time. These men walked with God, and they will feed your soul.

5. Listen to wholesome music, especially the great hymns of the faith.

I enjoy many of the praise choruses, especially those that are taken directly from Scripture. But also, some of the great hymns have a history of sustaining God's people down through the years, and they are doctrinally meaty. The Wesley's used hymns to teach theology to many who were illiterate. Get recordings of the great hymns and play them until you know them by heart. They will fill your mind with wholesome truth.

Conclusion

A number of years ago, the news media picked up the story of a woman known as "Garbage Mary." She lived in a smelly Chicago tenement amid mounds of garbage. She spent her time rummaging through trash cans. She would bum cigarettes off her neighbors. Police took her to a psychiatric hospital after she was stopped for questioning and found to be in a confused state of mind. When they went into her filthy apartment, they were astounded to find stock certificates and bank books indicating she was worth at least a million dollars. She was the daughter of a wealthy Illinois lawyer. It's a pathetic story, but it pictures the lives of many professing Christians, who could be immersing their thought life in that which is true, dignified, right, pure, lovely, of good repute; that which is virtuous and worthy of praise. But instead, they surround themselves with moral filth, wallowing daily in raunchy TV programs, polluting their minds with the sordid stories of this condemned world, rather than focusing their thought life on the things of God and Christ.

VII. Obedient Living

⁹ The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.