



Philippians 4:8-9 - Thinking Biblically **By Pastor Mike Clark 08/18/24**

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Philippians 4:8-9 - ⁸ Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. ⁹ What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

In the fourth chapter of **Philippians** Paul has been calling believers to ways they are to persevere in the Lord.

Specific ways that they are to give special attention to in their lives, so that they will be able to "stand firm...in the Lord." (v. 1)

- Get along with one another
- Rejoice in the Lord always
- Let your gentleness be known to all men
- Be anxious about nothing, but instead, pray about everything

Now, Paul adds another. And it's no small thing.

Because this one gets at the root of the reason why the Lord Jesus saved us to begin with:

- Our sanctification.
- Our holiness.

Understand: Christ didn't save us because we were worthy of heaven. He didn't die for us because he needed our eternal companionship. He suffered on that brutal cross to sanctify us and make us **HOLY!**

Galatians 4:1 - Who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father.

Titus 2:14 - Who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

This is the chief end of everything he has done and suffered on the earth.
This is why he set aside the robes of divine majesty and took on human flesh!

This is why he endured every temptation we face, but to the uttermost degree.
This is why he suffered such bitter agony and was handed over to the cross!



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The Almighty Lord of Glory subjected to the punishment of slaves! The Holiest of Holy treated like the guiltiest of all criminals.

To purify us from our sins. To sanctify us in holiness.

Paul began this very epistle with this prayer:

Philippians 1:9-11 - ⁹ And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, ¹⁰ so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, ¹¹ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

And now Paul ends this epistle with this corresponding exhortation. (vv. 8-9)

And Paul does not command of us mere external shows of holiness, because holiness is never only an external word or action.

That's Hypocrisy! BUT holiness is always of the heart.

RELIGION is preoccupied with practicing the externals of devotion, BUT HOLINESS is possessing God-like virtues of the heart,

- **AND desiring the perfect possession of them more and more,**
- **UNTIL Christ is formed in you...**
- **UNTIL you attain "the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ," (Eph. 4.13)**

The heart that possesses holiness is a heart that is deeply dissatisfied with the degree of holiness it possesses because holiness yearns!

Psalms 139.23-24 - Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! 24 And see if there be any grievous way in me and lead me in the way everlasting!

Holiness cannot live peaceably with anything that grieves the heart of God, who is Holy, Holy, Holy!

LIKE a wife who can't tolerate the affections of her husband being given to any other woman.

There is a righteous jealousy to holiness, THAT your whole heart be given in undivided affection to your beloved bridegroom, the Lord Jesus Christ.



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AND if you are going to INCREASE in holiness one bit, AND if you are going to STAND FIRM in holiness at all, THEN you must give yourself to the following habits of the heart and mind.

Because any real sanctification in your life must begin with your thought life.

If you think holy thoughts, you will be holy. If you think unholy thoughts, you will be unholy. You will live unworthy of the Gospel, and unworthy of Christ.

SO: Paul lists 6 ways our thoughts should be governed in order to be holy.

He defines all that is excellent and holy using 6 adjectives and 2 nouns. The concluding 2 nouns summarize and describe the 6 ways we are to think and increase in holiness.

1. Thinking biblically means thinking on things that are True.

If we would be holy, we must always embrace the truth, and reject what is false.

You might say, "Well, of course. No one would knowingly believe a lie."

Really? Did you know that we do it more than you think!

We believe less than what is true about God, AND more than what is true about ourselves.

This is the whole trouble with our lives. We doubt the truth and promises of God, AND believe the lies and doubts told us by the devil and our flesh and this world. AND we generally do this every day!

Our problem is that we're not as discerning of the truth - from falsehood - as we might like to think!

We often prefer to believe the lie over the truth. Oftentimes that appears MUCH more pleasant to us.

That the lie will bring us much more happiness than the truth, which, our flesh, says, "Is so hard and displeasing...inconvenient."

LISTEN, the devil is a very good liar, and our flesh is a very gullible fool.



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LIKE a wide-eyed little child, who is so easily tricked by an older kid into doing something that sounds really fun, but will only get him into trouble, once the deed is done.

In fact, our flesh is more than a gullible fool, it's often an **EAGER** fool.

The sinfulness of our nature and the passions of our flesh are often eager and quite willful in the embracing of lies over the truth.

LIKE an addict that craves the very drugs that are destroying his life.

LIKE as Proverbs warns, of the man who is lured by the smooth words and sensual appearance of the forbidden woman, the adulteress...

- It's "as a bird [that] rushes into a snare; he does not know that it will cost him his life." (7.23)
- "Her house is the way to Sheol, going down to the chambers of death." (7.27)

We are like that with every sin we ever commit! Romans 6 says it's a willful subjection of ourselves again to slavery...

Proverbs 5:22-23 - The iniquities of the wicked ensnare him, and he is held fast in the cords of his sin. He dies for lack of discipline, and because of his great folly he is led astray.

So, we're led astray by lies into sins. But the truth always leads us into holiness.

So, this first command is a call to **DISCERNMENT** in our thinking.

- Discernment is spiritual thinking that leads to sanctification.
- Lack of discernment is carnal thinking - foolish thinking - that leads to sins.

Train your mind to recognize the truth, and whatever doesn't align with it can be safely rejected. In fact, discernment is the path to safety from sins.

So, growth in holiness means learning to banish from your mind the falsehoods of the devil, the flesh, and this world.

That includes vain thoughts, empty thoughts, things that only **APPEAR** to be true.

We often believe vain things about ourselves. It's at the root of much of our pride and self-love, on the one hand, thinking too highly of yourself.



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And insecurities and fears on the other hand, thinking too low thoughts of yourself as one loved by Christ.

**Discernment will peer past the surface to perceive the truth underneath.
Discernment fights to know the truth when the lies keep coming at you.**

Discernment alerts you to something dangerous.

How do you become discerning?

There are two tools you need to discern truth from error: The Word of God and The Holy Spirit.

1 John 4.1-4 - Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. 2 By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, 3 and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already. 4 Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. 5 They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them. 6 We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

**How does the Holy Spirit teach us discernment of what is false or sinful?
Through comparing it against the truth and showing us how it falls short!**

Where is the standard of truth found? In the Scriptures!

THE GREATEST SOVEREIGN REMEDY against sin is to spend time, MUCH time, THOUGHTFUL time, MEDITATIVE time, in the Scriptures.

If you don't like reading, then listen to someone read it to you. But don't do nothing with the Bible. You have no excuse with today's technology.

This is not extracurricular Christianity! This is basic discipleship of Jesus Christ!

Because it's impossible to get rid of the trash in our minds without replacing it with an entirely different way of thinking.

Psalm 119.9-11 - How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word. With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments! I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.



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Psalm 119:1-6 - Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the LORD! Blessed are those who keep his testimonies, who seek him with their whole heart, who also do no wrong, but walk in his ways! You have commanded your precepts to be kept diligently. Oh that my ways may be steadfast in keeping your statutes! Then I shall not be put to shame, having my eyes fixed on all your commandments.

On the very night that Jesus was betrayed, he prayed these words to his Father in John 17:17 - Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.

There is no enduring sanctification apart from the regular immersion of your mind in the Word of God!

There are no shortcuts about this matter!

Romans 12:2 - Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Let me put it simply: Your mind MUST be regularly renewed in the truth, OR ELSE you will be conformed to this world.

You must have a regular diet of Scripture flooding your mind with the truth, or you will live in greater and greater sin. There's no way around this fact.

There's no endurance in the Lord apart from the sanctifying effect that ONLY the Word of God has on your mind.

You are either increasing in thinking God's thoughts after him by reading, meditating, memorizing, and studying His Word,

OR ELSE you will be increasing in thinking the devil's and the world's thoughts after them, ESPECIALLY in the entertainment-overloaded, news-saturated, advertising-manipulated, media-connected world in which we must make our pilgrimage.

You are not God, so you can't live here without needing regular doses of heavenly wisdom and truth injected into your mind and heart.

Some of you might be spiritually sick because you've been neglecting your medicine. You've been fasting, and it isn't from food and drink.

Listen to these POWERFUL words spoken by Jesus during his own pilgrimage, when he was being tempted in his flesh to sin:



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Matthew 4:4 But he answered, "It is written, "'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

He said: You need them to live. But some of you may be going long stretches between Bible meals. Some of you only eat Bible snacks.

That in itself is to believe lies. Lies that you CAN live without the words that come from the mouth of God.

But the Holy Spirit within you keeps pricking your conscience. He keeps pressing you to meditate on God's Word, to slow down, to make time, to do it!

What's keeping you from your food? Your computer? Your phone? Your television? Your recreations? Your over exertions at work?

Your lack of hunger? Your love for sin? Your spiritual indifference? Your excuses? Too busy to read God's Word? Then foolishly so, you're too busy.

Even kings and leaders - extraordinarily busy people - are told to make this their **FIRST** priority!

Deut. 17:18-20 - ¹⁸“And when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself in a book a copy of this law, approved by the Levitical priests. ¹⁹ And it shall be with him, and he shall read in it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God by keeping all the words of this law and these statutes, and doing them, ²⁰ that his heart may not be lifted up above his brothers, and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, either to the right hand or to the left, so that he may continue long in his kingdom, he and his children, in Israel.

Joshua 1:7-9 - ⁷ Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go. ⁸ This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. ⁹ Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”

By the way, that's the very same promise that Paul repeats here in v. 9: "the God of peace will be with you."

Think on whatsoever is TRUE, and the God of peace will be with you.



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He'll teach you the truth. He'll lead you in the truth. The truth that will sustain you, purify you, keep you from the lies, and from falling.

His Word is the lie detector. And his Spirit living within you rings the Scripture bell, warning you that what you're hearing or thinking isn't in line with Scriptural truth.

Heed the voice of the Spirit speaking His Word to you.

This is a promise of the Gospel. We have been delivered from the kingdom of darkness of ignorance, lies, deception, sin.

And translated into the kingdom of his Son of the knowledge of God, of the knowledge of the truth, spiritual illumination.

We've been given a GREAT gift in the knowledge of the truth. The whole world is bound in the chains of lies.

But we've been delivered from those chains. So, by the reading of the Word, and the illumination of the Spirit, may we think on whatsoever is true to the glory of God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

There's a second facet to holy thinking:

2. Thinking biblically means thinking on things that are Honorable.

Or whatever is "honest" (KJV) or "noble"

The idea is: "worthy of respect" or "dignified." It's the opposite of what is base or dishonorable or shameful.

**Do you want to live a life that's above reproach? A life that's worthy of honor?
Do you want to be someone that will not be ashamed before the face of the Lord?**

Then we have to learn to banish anything from our thought life and our speech and our actions that does not reflect the worthiness – the loftiness – of the holiness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

LISTEN, you are: a child of GOD!

- **An heir of heaven!**
- **A brother of the Lord Jesus!**
- **A fellow-citizen of the angels!**



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- A chosen race!
- A holy nation!
- A royal priesthood!
- God's own precious possession!
- The specially chosen bride of Christ!

Those are HIGH honors and HIGH qualities that are true of you, if you are in Christ!!

We've been taken from the bottom of the sewage pit, from the ranks of hell's trophies,

AND we have been:

- purged from our filth,
- forgiven of our rebellions,
- adopted as sons of God,
- given an invaluable inheritance in the kingdom of heaven,
- and honored above measure by being seated in heavenly places in Christ!

We have been endowed with incredibly high honors! Honors as high as God himself!

And such high honors require and compel from us to maintain only THE most noble, THE most honorable, & THE most holy thoughts.

We are not to entertain shameful thoughts:

- Thoughts that would make us blush if our fellow brothers & sisters were to know them, remembering that our Lord already does,
- Thoughts too disgraceful to be found in the mind of a SAINT,
- Thoughts that betray our holy calling, AND blight the high honors granted to us by our Lord,
- Thoughts that would betray His honor and scandalize His holiness.

They are to be banished from our minds. They are beneath us as those who are exalted in Christ because they are beneath Him.

INSTEAD: we're to think of only those things that are honorable. Things that correspond to our exalted privileges as sons of the living God,

OF our Father,

- Who is the majestic King of Kings and Lord of Lords.
- Who is Holy, Holy, Holy.

Think on whatever is honorable.....to HIM!



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As Paul turns the diamond of holiness, the next facet that shines is:

3. Thinking biblically means thinking on things that are Just.

Or whatever is “right” (NASB). Don’t dwell on what is wrong.

The idea is: thinking about what we SHOULD, what we OUGHT.

Sometimes we simply don’t think the things we ought to think. We think things we ought not.

We ought to think rightly about God:

Acts 17:29 - Being then God’s offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man.

We ought to think rightly about ourselves:

Romans 12:3 - For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.

We ought to think rightly about doctrine (our beliefs):

Titus 1:11 - They must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach.

We ought to think rightly about others:

James 3:10 - From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so.

We ought to think rightly about our entertainment:

Thinking about whatever is “right” would surely include the influence on our minds by:

- the programs we watch on TV
- and the music we listen to
- and the things we read.

Because without question, these things shape our thoughts.



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- They often plant wrong thoughts in you.
- They easily give birth to thinking what you ought not.

FOR EXAMPLE:

You can't regularly expose yourself or your children (even your teenagers) to freewheeling sexual attitudes and lifestyles portrayed on the screen and remain unaffected. It's powerful wickedness!

We have to beware of being sympathetic toward and absorbing into ourselves the anger, greed, sensuality, disrespect of authority, vengefulness & violence that is acted out and sung about today.

Beware of how YOUR thoughts and attitudes & your CHILDREN'S are being shaped by your entertainment!

Think and feel what you should! What should you think about?

What God commands us to do toward others – this is what we should think about!

- A. **WHETHER** honoring, submitting to, or deferring to those over us
 - a. Those that govern us
 - b. Lead us spiritually
 - c. Employ us
 - d. Our parents
- B. **OR** giving love, guidance, care, and protection to those under our care
 - a. Our wives,
 - b. Children
 - c. Employees
- C. **OR** giving friendship, forgiveness, and godly assistance to our peers
 - a. Our girlfriend/boyfriend
 - b. Our co-workers
 - c. Our neighbors
 - d. Fellow believers in the church

Think toward them as you ought!

4. Thinking biblically means thinking on things that are Pure.

The word means "holy." Think about things that are morally blameless.

This means don't dwell on things that are morally filthy or dirty. Don't entertain sinful, polluted thoughts.

How do you keep from having dirty thoughts? Think pure ones instead!



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When the temptation to dwell on impure thoughts comes, fight it with inserting pure thoughts in their place!

Yes, this is a fight! Maybe you battle terribly against immoral thoughts in your own life. Don't lose hope, think on whatever is pure!

SEE: We're not only to be careful to be pure in our bodies (sexually and every other way) BUT we're also to be careful to be pure in our thought life too.

**Because we are the temple of the Holy Spirit. A HOLY GOD lives in us!
AND the Temple of the Holy Spirit must not be allowed to be defiled within.**

1 John 3:2-3 - Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

2 Corinthians 7:1 - Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.

Pure thoughts are thoughts THAT DON'T grieve the Spirit or prick the conscience. THAT DON'T imagine sinful things.

**They are thoughts formed in the fear of God, in integrity toward others,
And they promote the preservation and increase of our own holiness.**

SO, thinking holy thoughts means: We're to think on whatever is: true, honorable, just, pure...

We should adorn our minds with these things like diamonds in a crown.

5. Thinking biblically means thinking on things that are Lovely.

Honestly, this has to do with what we call AESTHETICS.

Aesthetics is concerned with the appreciation of beauty and good taste.

That's what Paul is actually saying here: Think on whatever is beautiful and of good taste.

What is delightful, pleasing, graceful, elegant, attractive, genuinely beautiful...



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...before God!

Not what is disgusting or repulsive. Not what is seedy or sickening. Not what is nasty or offensive.

It seems like so much entertainment today is taken up with this kind of thing too!

Don't be like a dog eating its own disgusting vomit with your thoughts. Don't be like a pig wallowing in the mire in your imaginations.

Don't think about ugly, vile, grotesque things. It's offensive to the Spirit. Dwell on what is lovely.

Some of you live with thoughts that are dark and depressed. Your thoughts are like a sky full of stormy clouds.

Sometimes rays of sun shoot through, and you feel joy and lightness. But maybe for you, mostly, it's dark in there.

MAYBE in your past, you've been involved in some sort of ABUSE.

- **Someone has hurt you deeply and repeatedly:**
 - **Verbally, emotionally, even sexually**
- **You are haunted by the memories and the pain of it**
- **Those thoughts never seem to ever be completely healed**
 - **Or at least never quite healed enough that it isn't adversely affecting your relationships now.**
- **Those thoughts shape you emotionally, spiritually, relationally.**
- **You have a hard time overcoming them:**
 - **Forgiving the person,**
 - **Feeling free from the guilt and the shame of it (even though you were not in the wrong),**
 - **Relinquishing the grudge,**
 - **Feeling like you could ever be truly loved,**
 - **Knowing how to love and how to receive love,**

OR MAYBE you live with REGRETS

- **You regret choices you've made**
- **The job you left**
- **The opportunity you missed**
- **You regret some of the ways you've parented**
- **Or you regret how you treated your own parents growing up**
- **A move you made**



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OR MAYBE you live with FEELING HOPELESS

- **The trials you have are overwhelming you in a flood of despair**
- **You can only think about the problems, and feel the pain, and ponder the fearful unknowns,**
- **It's hard to see the goodness and mercy of God toward you.**

Some of you, that's where you live: In that dungeon of dark thoughts. You're a captive to debilitating introspection, AND to the emotions it all creates.

Much of the problem is that: You entertain those memories and those regrets and those fears to the point that, though you hate them, you continue to ponder them.

And in doing that you give to them the power to enslave your thinking, feeling and doing even more.

When the way to be free from your past, and your fears, your sorrows is to relinquish it all to the Lord Jesus.

If you are a believer, your past has been covered, washed, cleansed, purged, separated from you as far as the east is from the west, plunged into the sea of God's forgetfulness.

You've been forgiven. You've been enabled to forgive.

The work of Christ poured through promises of the Gospel are the real power to set you free from your dark thoughts.

Expose them to the light of the Gospel.

- **I am forgiven!**
- **I am loved by my Heavenly Father!**
- **My past is covered by the blood of Jesus!**
- **My regrets are covered by the grace of God!**
- **In my trials, I'm being accompanied by my strong Father!**
- **I am free from them, because Christ has overcome them on the cross and in his resurrection.**

All that sin and hurt and pain and fear is why Jesus came to die for us!

- **He saved us by delivering us!!**
- **To re-create us as a new creature – clean & new & safe in his arms.**



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That's what the Gospel says!! Because that's what the Gospel does!

Do you believe that? Do you believe the Gospel?

Some of you live with such condemnation and guilt, regret and fear and depression

- **Over sins that are forgiven.**
- **Over things covered by the blood.**
- **Over things done TO you, not even BY you.**

That's the devil's club he loves to beat you bloody with.

- **Jesus died to disarm him of his weapons against you! (Col. 2.14-16)**
- **Quit giving the devil his club back!!**

Think on things that are lovely! Think on the beautiful promises of the Gospel that speak to YOUR life!

6. Thinking biblically means thinking on things that are Commendable.

Of good report. What is admirable. What is praiseworthy.

In other words, think those things that if they were to be made known, would be able to be commended, *not condemned*, before both God and man.

Think about lofty things, things held in high esteem, NOT things of low regard.

Do you see how Paul, with each of these adjectives is taking us higher and higher in our thought life?

How he's ratcheting our thinking toward more and more holiness and honor and purity and beauty and praiseworthiness?

Paul is just piling up virtue upon virtue that are to characterize our minds, Calling us to the highest, purest, holiest of thoughts,

And he just reaches the heights of expression and finally says, in summary:

Whatever is of any excellence or of any praiseworthiness...

In other words: adorn your mind with EVERYTHING excellent and beautiful!! EVERYTHING God-honoring & Gospel-agreeing!



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AND DON'T limit your thinking to only one or two of these virtues, BECAUSE God commands us to strive after ALL of them!

SO treat these virtues like inseparable sisters, so firmly linked together that they can't be torn apart!

For example: It's not OK to be sexually pure on the one hand, while at the same time being hateful and unloving.

It's not OK to tolerate dark, Gospel-denying thoughts on the one hand, while we commend ourselves for not being greedy.

NO! These virtues go together, as interconnected, overlapping aspects of holiness.

SO: Our hearts should embrace ALL that God has commanded of us because they ALL are the marks of our holiness.

And they're what make us "fitted for heaven." "For without holiness, no man shall see the Lord." (Heb. 12.14)

Now notice at the end of verse 8 it says, "think on these things!" Think about your thinking! And the end of verse 9 says "practice these things!"

DO NOT neglect any one of these things in your thinking! OR omit any one of these things in your doing!

It's your mind that informs and influences your will. It's your mind that stirs up your desires and your affections and emotions.

It's your mind that conceives and produces every action you take. It all begins in your mind!

That's why it is so critical to think holy thoughts. It's the only way to live holy lives.

The point of Paul's exhortation in these verses is to call us to holiness in the inner man.

It's a call to the renewing of our minds through a lifetime of serious attention and reflection and meditation on what is holy.

And to keep on doing it until we reach heaven's shores.



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AND THE PROMISE is that when we PRACTICE these things in our thinking, Then, v. 9b – “the God of peace will be with [us]”

Why is this such a precious promise?

BECAUSE if you want to “stand firm...in the Lord.” (4.1)

IF you want to endure this pilgrimage in faithfulness to Christ,

THEN you need the peace of God and the God of peace:

- **guarding you,**
- **stabilizing you,**
- **protecting you,**
- **breathing his power on you,**
- **purifying you and fitting you for heaven.**
- **By giving you holy thoughts**

It’s God who works in you both to desire and accomplish his will ...in your thought life. God gives us holy thoughts.

This is the way to be spiritually stable until Jesus returns.

2 Corinthians 7:1 - Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.