

Rich Nathan
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Philippians Series
Philippians 4:8-9

The Benefit of Right Thinking and Right Doing

This evening [morning] I want to talk about thinking and doing right. If you have a Bible open it up to Philippians 4:8 where the apostle Paul says:

“Finally brothers, [and I will add in 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. 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.”

Over the last several weeks, I have talked about how to have peace and how to relieve your worry and anxiety, especially as things in America seem to be in tremendous turmoil as we have gone through one of the really tragic periods of our national history with the bombing of Oklahoma City. There just seems to be so much division in our country. If you listen to the talk shows, there is such a radical division between the right and the left—folks who oppose government at every turn. Every little infringement on their rights or what is perceived to be their rights and they are willing to kill someone over it. Other people are advocating even more government regulations and more government intrusion.

There is such a radical division in our country between those who radically are for abortions and the killing of children in the womb and those who are opposed to it. It

seems like almost any issue that we lay out these days, you are going to find people at the extremes.

And with this kind of tension in the culture, this kind of divisiveness and angry debate that is going on, the Bible speaks about having peace in a world that is topsy-turvy. And so the apostle Paul says that if we do these certain things that he is suggesting here in Philippians 4:8-9, the God of peace will be with us. In other words, there are certain benefits and blessings from the activities that he is describing in verses 8 and 9. And the great benefit that he is talking about is that God will be with you. Not only will you be walking with God, but God will be walking with you.

What is it specifically that the apostle Paul calls us to do? Well, while there are a lot of words in these two verses, there is a list of qualities that he goes through. There are really only two verbs in verses 8 and 9. There are just two things that the apostle Paul says that these are the things that I want you to do. There are just two commands and everything else just describes the two commands. But the two things, the two verbs, the two commands that the apostle Paul suggests for us to do is, first of all, you must think (verse 8). “If there is anything excellent or praiseworthy think about such things.” The first command is to think. The second command is to do—whatever you have learned, received or heard or seen, put it into practice. Think and, then, put it into practice. Think and do.

See, Paul in this text, is telling us that there are certain benefits, there is a great blessing accruing to the person who thinks in the right way and who also does the right things. All of us want blessing in our lives. We want good things for ourselves and for our children. You want your child to be happy, don’t you? There is no parent in

America, just about, who would say that they want their children to grow up unhappy. All of us want our kids to be happy.

And all of want to be, personally, happy. The problem is most of us don't know how to get there. People think that certain things will make them happy. That they will be happier if they maximize their freedom or happier if they move to another state. Happier if they switch jobs. Happier if they move in with their boyfriend or girlfriend or purchase another product or buying a new car.

Paul says, "I am going to let you in on a little secret. This is the way that you can live a happy life and this is the way you can teach your kids to maximize their happiness in the future. It all boils down to thinking about the right things and doing the right things."

We are continually conned into avoiding the issue of what we are thinking about and what we are doing as the source of blessing and happiness. We often believe as Christians, that if we go to a certain meeting or if we have a certain experience, then that will make us happy. That will guarantee happiness in the long-term.

Paul says no. It is not a matter of going to a meeting and I believe meetings are wonderful and the experiences that we have are wonderful, but long-term living with a consistent sense of blessing, that is of God being with you, turns on thinking about the right things regularly and doing the right things regularly. Even our impact—if we want to stretch this idea out a little bit more regarding blessing and not just focus on blessing for ourselves, but blessing through us toward others—our impact on the world around us turns on these two simple issues. Right thinking and right behavior, right doing.

We are talking about doing a Summer Harvest here at Vineyard. Reaching out to our community which requires that we have a certain impact on the community. That there will be something attractive about our lives that would make people wonder what we have in our lives.

Do you know that Paul says that Christians are to live such good lives that Jewish people would become jealous? That those who wonder if Jesus really was the Messiah, who have been taught since they were little that Jesus is not the Messiah, that we are to wait for another person, that the quality of a Christian life would be so great, there would be such an attractiveness in terms of the Christian's love and gentleness and integrity and humility and truth telling, that Jewish people would be forced to say you have something in your life that is really, really nice—what is it?

That a Jewish person would actually end up saying, “You know, it is not just that you are into your thing and I am into my thing, but your thing seems better than my thing. What is it? What is going on?”

You know, that is what happened to me as a Jewish person. I met a Christian whose life was better than mine. I didn't know that it was Jesus, but there was a quality in her life that I saw was better than what I had in my life. What did it boil down to? Right thinking and right actions.

We want to have some impact on the community around us on teachers that we might meet in our children's schools, on friends at work, on students who sit around us in class, on neighbors, on family. Not just personal blessings, but that we would be channels of blessing that would make someone inquire, “Gee, you know, you do seem to

have something really different. Not just different opinions, but a different life—what is it?” Right thinking. Right actions.

And so the apostle Paul says in verse 8, “You must think.” It is a command. Not just think about such things as a suggestion, but you just think about certain things. If you want to be blessed and have God walking with you, you have to fill your mind with certain things. If you want to be a channel of blessing to others, you must think. The Greek word that Paul uses here for thinking is the word from which we derive the word “logic.” There is an implication here of reasoning, of calculating, of setting your mind on certain things, to evaluate, to reckon. And it is totally the whole force of what Paul is saying in verse 8 is coming against the passive drift of our minds that most of us live with most of the time where we uncritically go through life accepting media impressions and advertisements and whatever just walks by in front of us. We see somebody and our eyes follow that. And we are daydreaming all day long.

Paul says, “That is not what I want. That is not going to lead to blessing, this passive, drifting, daydreaming, undisciplined mind.”

If you want blessing in your life and you want God walking with you, you have to give yourself to concentrating on what you are thinking about. This is such a different view of what people have of Christianity. I mean isn’t it the case, especially when we are talking about Christianity of the kind that we practice here in the Vineyard where we use emotion, the music is hot, we pray for the sick here. Boy, you know in those kinds of circles, there is the impression that we don’t do any critical thinking around here—no way, no how! Get out of your mind! Before you enter the church doors, you better unscrew your head and leave it on the hat-rack.

Paul says unscrewing your head will never lead to God walking with you or to peace in a turbulent time. You must think. You have to ponder. And this takes concentrated effort.

In the Bible what is going on inside of our heads is a major source of the spiritual warfare that we will encounter in our lives. You know, we think of spiritual warfare as dealing only with our externals—the pressure put on us financially because of cut-backs at work or the fact that business is not going well. We think of spiritual warfare as a lot of people in our families or we have been sick over the last week or last few months. We put warfare in the realm of relational stress—being misunderstood by a family member or somebody, a neighbor.

Of course, spiritual warfare i.e. the conflict that exists between God and the demonic realm can be played out on most any front in our relationships, in our health, in our finances. But the Bible teaches that one of the major fronts, the major battle ground for spiritual warfare is what is going on in our minds. And if you do not regularly monitor your thoughts, what is happening in your mind, you are missing the battle. You are missing the war. If you are not in touch with the state of your mind and whether you are regularly engaged in right thinking, then you are like a general who is worried about whether the officer's club is well-stocked with good scotch or whether his uniform has been properly pressed. But who gets no reports and really doesn't pay attention to what is going on on the field of battle and then wonders why he is losing the war.

Biblically, the major battleground is not your finances. It is not necessarily even your health. It is what is going on in your mind.

The apostle Paul says this in 2 Corinthians 10 when he says:

“Though we live in the world, we don’t wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. 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.”

The weapons have to do with arguments and various pretensions i.e. different ways of being proud and hypocritical. All of this is going on in our minds. Therefore, we need to take captive every thought, bring all of our thoughts under the Lordship of Christ. You start concentrating on what you are thinking about and you will see that this takes incredible moral exertion, concentrated effort.

And if you will concentrate on your thoughts, you will find that you are able to experience the peace of God. Right thinking really does lead to blessing.

Now, let me try to apply this to the way we feel and also to what we do and try to establish for you the link between your thoughts, what is going on in your head, and the way you feel, your moods. You know, some years ago, some psychologists of the more rational and cognitive schools came up with what they called the “ABC of Mood Control.” Basically, they said that most people believe that certain actions occur, certain activities occur and as a result of those activities, they have certain moods. There are certain consequences.

So, for example, your husband is late home from work again, therefore you are depressed. Or therefore you are angry as the wife.

You failed a test and therefore you are depressed as a student. They said that this whole business of some action made me anxious, some happening made me depressed, or

made me angry—You make me so angry—what that idea fails to realize is that in between an action and a consequence is a belief, is a thought. And that depending on how a person relates to what is going on, their mood is going to change. See, all actions that occur to us pass through our beliefs, our thoughts, and that is what controls our moods. What we are thinking about. Not what happens to us, but how we respond in our minds and our beliefs to what is going on around us.

So, for example, I once talked with a person who said that they were depressed most of the time. I asked them to tell me when is the last time they were depressed. They said, “Just yesterday.” I said, “Well, go back over your day and tell me when you first became depressed.” They said, “Well, things started off real good and I was not depressed in the morning, but on my way to work I was speeding and I was pulled over by a police officer. They gave me a ticket and that really got me depressed and upset and so I went to work and the rest of the day was just shot.”

I said, “So, what you are telling me that because you were pulled over by a police officer for speeding, that made you depressed. Is that right?”

They said, “That’s exactly right.”

I said, “Well, now, can you remember what you were thinking about after you were pulled over. I mean something was going on in your head. If we could put your thoughts up on a screen the moment after you were pulled over, what would the screen show?”

They said, “Well, I don’t remember exactly, but I remember thinking like this: You are so stupid. You can’t do anything right. You can’t even drive right. These

things always happen to you. There is no use trying because no matter what you do you always blow it.”

Then she said, “Later, as I drove to work, I just felt depressed.”

So, let’s call the person Mary. I said, “Mary, do you see that the thing that happened to you, being pulled over, didn’t make you depressed. That in between there was the second step—your thoughts and what was going on in your mind, your beliefs about what happened that made you depressed, that created the mood for the rest of the day?”

“Well, I think so...”

“Well, Mary, let me play out a different scenario and see how your mood might have been different. Let’s say you were stopped by the police and instead of screaming at yourself, you said, ‘Lord, forgive me for breaking the law. I know that the Bible tells me to obey the law and therefore it was wrong of me to speed. Please forgive me. But God I am so glad that I don’t have to punish myself or yell at myself because of every wrong that I do, because the punishment for my sins was taken care of by Jesus when he was hung on the cross. Lord, thanks so much for the Bible verse that says that the Lord has laid on him, on Christ, the iniquity of us all. God, if I had to bear the punishment for everything wrong that I did, I would be so miserable.

Thank you for the fact that I was pulled over because this incident tells me again, God, how terrible it would be for me if I was judged by the law rather than by your grace. God, if you nailed me for everything that I did wrong, it would be horrible. Thank you for your grace.’

Mary, what if you then began thinking about the word “grace” and you said, ‘Oh, grace is such a great word. I love the word grace.’ And then, as you were pulling away from the police officer, what if you rolled up your windows and sang at the top of your lungs *Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me...I once was lost, but now I’m found, was blind but now I see...* How do you think you would feel once you got to work having sung “Amazing Grace” to yourself? If your mind was filled with that?”

“Well, if I was singing “Amazing Grace” and I really believed that God’s grace was there for me, I would probably feel pretty happy and pretty grateful.”

Friends, do you see that there is a connection between your moods and what you think about all of the time? You say that you keep falling into anxiety. You are just an anxious person. Things make you anxious. But that is not the case. In between some event and your feelings of anxiety, what is played out in your mind makes you anxious. If you would concentrate on what you are thinking about and decide that you are not going to ride this anxious thought all the way out. You are going to get off the train earlier instead of staying on the train of anxious thoughts for 10 or 20 minutes.

If you were focused on the battlefield and said, “Oh my goodness that is an anxious thought? I need to take that captive to Christ and refocus my mind.”

Perhaps you struggle with lust and you find yourself in full-blown lust after a period of time during the day. And then you berate yourself. How can I have these defiling thoughts and I am just so unclean and impure. Because it just happened that some pretty woman walked across your path or you saw something on television that

created all of these thoughts. It created this mood of lust. But really, you have just not been focused on what you are thinking about.

Our thoughts not only control our moods, they certainly control our actions. So many of the things that we have as automatic behaviors or bad habits are not as automatic as they seem. I have talked with a number of men who from time to time have struggled with going to adult bookstores. They will say, “I don’t know, I just found myself in the car and it was just sort of going in that direction. It seemed so automatic.” Sexual things are often like that. It is like people feel as though they are just falling into a hole and they don’t understand their own behavior. We feel so ashamed about it.

But, in fact, as we focus on what is going on in our minds, we see that there was a whole series of thoughts that were occurring well before the car began to move or well before we tumbled into bed. There was a whole series of thoughts. And what at first seems to be quite automatic and quite innocent and quite unthinking really, in fact, had a whole plan behind it.

If we concentrated on our thoughts, we would not nearly be so subject to our bad moods and the kind of mood that we set that is bad and affects our family or work place. We play this mood control game. “Watch it. Mommy or daddy is in a bad mood.” The whole family gets controlled by my mood or your mood. All of these automatic actions start with thinking.

So, we must take ourselves in hand and say, “I am going to exert some energy and some effort in my thought life. I will not passively drift with the kinds of thoughts that have been rutted out in my mind for so long. I am going to exert some effort to get off certain trains and to think about other things.”

Well, what should I think about?

The apostle Paul lays it out. If you are going to exert effort in your thought life, then think about first of all whatever is true. Now it is the case that so much of our bad mood and bad behavior is really resulted from this very simple fact that we come to the fork in the road of our thinking about what is true and we decide to take the opposite fork. We dwell on lies. Our moods and behavior can often be traced back to this very simple principle that much of the time our minds are filled with lies. Lies about ourselves, lies about life, life about God.

You know, if we slapped ourselves on the leg every once in a while and said, “OK, right now I am going to focus on what I have been thinking about. What have I been thinking about because I am depressed or angry or lustful or I am feeling envy? Or I am behaving in a way that is not consistent with the way that I want to behave.”

What I am thinking about? Very often, we would be thinking about a lie. A lie that says, perhaps, well I am not very valuable because my performance has not been good today or tonight. I didn’t do as good a job as I wanted to do in my kinship group teaching or in my interaction with someone in a woman’s group. That project that I was working on at work, my grades, weren’t what I would have hoped they would be. Therefore, I am depressed. The lie being that value is determined by performance rather than we are valuable because God says we are valuable. Because God is the source of our life and we are created all of us, every human being, in God’s image. Because God loves us. Because God decided that we are valuable enough to send his Son, Jesus, to die for us. To bleed. We are valuable enough that God continually wants every one of us and calls every one of us into relationship with him.

We are valuable enough that if we respond to God's call into relationship with him through faith in Jesus Christ, God says "I want you to live with me forever, so that I can relate to you forever." What gives us value is always God. It is never the most recent returns on our performance.

Very often, we stumble at this point right off the bat of the fact that our minds are filled with lies and not the truth. We don't believe the truth that God is in control. We don't believe the truth that no matter what is currently going on, God is good and wills to be good to us and will use what is happening in our lives for good.

And, frankly, brothers and sisters, I believe that in a media age, an age controlled by TV and by movies, by cable, in a media age it is very difficult for many of us to have our minds filled with what is true. You know, we are no longer chiefly influenced by books, by printed words. We are influenced now much more so by images projected at our minds from a screen. And it is hard to know when you are having images flashed at your mind what is true or even what to put value on.

Just think about what 15 minutes of television watching will flash at your mind. You will be, perhaps, watching a news show that shows you the tragedy of Oklahoma City. And inside you might feel great pity, great sorrow for the people that you are seeing in front of you. And then, the news will shift to a commercial for a sitcom in which people seem to be good people. They are very attractive and yet they are telling some off-color joke or some innuendo about condoms. The scene then flashes to another commercial where a woman is talking about how happy she is and how her life is fulfilled because she uses a certain kind of shampoo. And then we see that the next show

that is on is about a mad bomber who is threatening a city. That show about the mad bomber looks every bit as real as the Oklahoma City events.

We find it very hard to distinguish in a media age between what is real and what is not. What is true and what is false. It takes a great amount of concentration and, perhaps, a bit of fasting from the media for a little while to get our heads cleared.

You say, “This stuff about TV and the movies and the media doesn’t affect me and my ability to really concentrate on the truth and think about what is true most of the time.”

Well, brothers and sisters, I want to tell you that as I thought about all of the folks that I know, I have to honestly say that I have met very few people whose actions in the whole range of decisions in their lives concerning purchases and concerning speech and activity, child-raising, opinions—I have met very few people whose lives were consistently determined by the truth.

Now, I want you to follow something here because it is really important that you understand the shape of the world. What influences you and as a result of the shape of the world, you are being channeled into certain kinds of thoughts and opinions. Because of the shape of the world, what the Bible calls the “spirit of the age” and the Germans call the *Zeitgeist*, the influence of the culture, we Americans living in the 90’s think a certain way. Follow this here.

We are living at a time that has been labeled post-modernism. And from about roughly 1650-1960’s or so, the western world was living in what was called the modern age. And people living in the modern age basically had a certain charge or objection to Christianity. The modern person’s objection to Christianity was based on the truth. The

modern person looked at Christianity and said, “Well, you can’t prove that it is true, therefore, I don’t believe it. But if you could prove that it is true, I would listen to what you said and based on the evidence, I would perhaps make a commitment to become a Christian like you.”

The modern objection to Christianity had to do with whether we could prove that Christianity was or was not true. And books came out like *Evidence that Demands a Verdict* that dealt with the truth claims of Christianity.

Now, many people who are still influenced by the modern age would find books like *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* by Josh McDowell or other evidences to be very helpful. Some of you might be there and say, “How do I know Christianity is true?” There are a number of wonderful books out about the truth of the Bible or the truth of Christianity.

But I want you to know that since the 1960’s, we have entered a very different era. A time that is as radically different from the previous 300 years as the Renaissance was from the Middle Ages; and the Middle Ages was from the Roman Age. Since the 1960’s we are in a whole new world—the post-modern world. The post-modern world is not asking if Christianity is true. The post-modern world is saying, “Well, I don’t care if it is true or not. So long as it makes you happy, that is okay. I am not even interested in hearing about the truth of Christianity. I am glad that you are happy with your Jesus. I am happy hanging a crystal around my neck. If we are both happy, that is all that matters.”

See, the issue in the post-modern world is no longer the truth. To boil it down even more simply for you, people in a post-modern age do not decide what they are going

to do based on what is true. People in a post-modern world base what they are going to do and their decisions on what they like, on their preferences.

So we translate verse 8 to read not, “Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true...” we retranslate it to read, “Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever you like...” And what drives decisions now in almost every area of life is not, “Is this true or is it false?”, but “Do I like it or do I not like it?”

I really want you to get this so I am going to hit you squarely between the eyes as I push this point forward. There are many, many of us who decide what we are going to do not based on the truth of the matter, but do I like what is being said. How many conversations have you had with somebody or, perhaps, you are that somebody where an individual says, “Well, I see that it is here in the Bible. But I really feel uncomfortable with that. I really feel uncomfortable with what is being preached. I don’t like it. And because I don’t like it, I choose not to believe it.”

In a post-modern world, we shape our beliefs on what we like and we dismiss things that may be true because we don’t like it. Bringing this down to earth, we can start talking about some of the very uncomfortable truths that are in the Bible. Truths about whether it is right or wrong to get a divorce. You know, white middle-class, heterosexuals have, for the last ten years or so, been beating up on the gay rights movement and have suggested that the major threat to our family structure is what is going on over here in the gay rights movement.

May I suggest to those of us in the middle class that the major threat to our children has nothing to do with gay rights and everything to do with the number of

divorces that are present in our midst? That the Bible clearly teaches against divorce. But you won't find a Republican politician today speaking against divorce. Why not?

Because he or she knows that their audience doesn't like it. What is true, what we believe has nothing to do with our preferences.

Friends, let's take another uncomfortable doctrine in the Bible—the doctrine of hell. It is clearly taught in the Old and New Testament and, in fact, Jesus spoke more about hell than he did about love. The person in the Bible who talks the most about hell is Jesus, not Paul, not John, not one of the harsh disciples. Jesus, our loving Savior, talked the most about hell and the consequence of not making a decision to follow Christ. The consequence of eternal separation from God and conscious pain and suffering in a place of burning, in a place of fire.

Now, we think that hell is a more serious problem for us in 1995 than it was for people living 500 years ago and we say, "Well, you know, because I really don't like hearing about hell, I don't like reading about hell, I don't like talking about hell, therefore, I am not going to believe in it. It doesn't exist."

Brothers and sisters understand that no one in history has ever liked reading about hell or thinking about hell or hearing about hell. No one has ever liked what the Bible taught on divorce. The early disciples reacted with incredible horror to what Jesus was saying about divorce. No one has ever liked certain teachings that really attacked our self-centeredness or our egos or our private interests. Nobody has liked it. But in the past, people have said, "Well, whether I like it or not is not determinative on whether I believe it or not."

In the past people said, "I believe this based on whether it is true."

Now, if we could have a church that just gets that idea down, if you as an individual would stop personally believing things because you like them, it sounds good and it makes you comfortable and you started to believe things because they are true; if we distinguish in our minds truth and our preferences, we would have a much, much healthier church. We would have a church filled with people who were thinking right. People who could be approached and corrected because we would no longer be dealing with my subjective preference and your subjective preferences. All of us would be saying, “Hey, you know, I don’t like being confronted and I don’t like being told this or that, but if it is true, then I have to begin to believe it and follow it.”

And you know, the Bible teaches that over a period of time, if you walk with God, your preferences, your likes, will more and more line up with what is true. See, believers in the Bible are called people who love the truth. I think that when God’s spirit works in a person’s life for a period of time and if a person is submissive and yields to God’s spirit, over a period of time, more and more, the person is not only going to say, “Okay, that’s true.” The person is also going to say, “But you know, I am beginning to see the wisdom of that truth, the beauty of that truth. I am seeing the loveliness of that truth. That truth is more and more attractive to me. I don’t chafe at the bit any more when I think about that truth. I now see what God intends and why that truth is taught.”

Christians over a period of time, guided by the spirit of God, become lovers of the truth. And to think about the truth means that you think about the whole truth. I am not going to spend much time on this except to say, Brothers and sisters, not only do we have to stop listening to lies and shaping our behaviors on what we like, but we need to give ourselves in our thoughts to the whole truth and not pick and choose favorite Bible

verses. Gee, I have a few favorite Psalms that I always go to. People use to talk about listening to the whole counsel of God, the whole message—the uncomfortable parts, the comfortable parts, the doctrinal parts, the practical parts, the experiential parts—the whole thing. To fill your mind with truth means to fill it with the whole truth and not just the nice portions or the pretty portions or the 1 Corinthians 13 portions.

Well, Paul goes on and says that we not only think about what is true, but what is noble and right and pure and lovely. He is covering the range of human experience. He is talking about philosophy. Think about what is true. He is talking about ethics. Think about what is right. He is talking about ascetics and art. What is lovely.

I want to pause here and make one point and then we are going to finish up talking about putting all of this into action. You know, I was meditating on this notion on not only what is true but also what is lovely. And I really think that has reference, a strong application to the arts and to what we fill our minds with regarding the cinema, regarding television, regarding cable.

You say, “Well, I want the blessing of God on my life. I want not only to walk with God but to have God walk with me. I want to have a life that has such good qualities that it would make the Jews jealous.”

Paul says that a good part of it has to do with what you are thinking about. Think about what is true and what is lovely.

And so we come to this question: Do you fill your mind with what is lovely?

You know, friends, isn't it the case that so much of what is portrayed in movies and on television and in music does not focus on what is lovely but what is degrading? It is a portrait of the ugly, the debased, the obscene. How many times have you watched a

movie and said, “Who thought about something like this? How did they create a character who would be dominated by this particular obsession? Who would sexualize every situation? Who would cut off someone’s limbs?”

Turn on a talk show and ask yourself: Is what they are talking about lovely? Is it in-ennobling? Does it lift up the human spirit? Do you come away feeling more free and more in touch with God? More alive inside? Or do you come away feeling defiled because they are talking about some extraordinarily distorted view of sex or distorted view of child-raising?

What Paul is saying here, to put it in the negative, is don’t fill your mind with what is ugly. And, this is child-raising advice and not just advice for you. But if you have kids, this is counsel regarding how to raise your kids. That you would take concern for what is going on in filling their minds. Parents, you are not doing a good job as a parent, if you are passive regarding what your kids fill their minds with whether it is in music, videos, TV. I believe part of the responsibility of a parent is to assist your child to grow up so that they have the capacity to think lovely thoughts. And you can’t think lovely thoughts when your mind is filled with ugliness all day long.

If you listen to songs like Nirvana’s “Rape Me” or “Polly” about a girl being molested; if your kids are filling themselves with the ugly side of life, they are not going to be able to do what Paul says will lead to blessing. I am not suggesting that you go home and get down on your 18-year old. This is the kind of stuff that starts when your child is 6—we start talking about what we watch on TV and what is OK to see in videos and what kind of music is all right and what we hang in our rooms. You fill your mind with the beautiful, with the things that will set the spirit free.

And then Paul says, “But you have to take your thoughts and combine them with action.” The life that brings blessing to oneself and blessing to another is not only right thinking, but right action. Verse 9: “Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me or seen in me, put it into practice.” Paul, here, is perfectly laying out the difference between a Greek style of education and the Greek mind over against the Jewish mind. The Greeks always thought that so long as we fill somebody with correct ideas that that person would live a good life. Much of our modern educational system and really much of church life today is governed by the Greek way of approaching discipleship and education and basically it is based on correct ideas. It is all very intellectual.

I am always concerned when I meet people who have been steeped with intellectual Christianity because I know that they think they are farther along in discipleship and following Christ than they really are. The reason they think this is because they have the concepts down. As long as we can articulate the words correctly, we think we have it. That is the Greek notion.

But the Hebrew idea, the Jewish idea, is different. The Jewish idea was that being a disciple is a matter of having correct thinking, but also having correct doing. A close friend of mine, Don Williams, who spoke here several months ago—a Presbyterian pastor, loves to tell the story about Rabbi Akiba and how he followed his Rabbi, Rabbi Joshua, into the bathroom. This shocked one of Rabbi Akiba’s friends. He said, “How could you be so disrespectful?” Rabbi Akiba said that he wanted to follow his Rabbi in all that his Rabbi did—not just to follow his Rabbi’s words, but his actions. He said, “I

followed him into the privy and I learned three good habits by watching him go to the bathroom.”

I haven’t a clue as to what those habits are, but that is what Paul is laying out here. He is laying out a Jewish pattern for discipleship which does deal with hearing—things like what you have learned, what you have heard me teach; what you have received, that is stuff that I have told you that didn’t originate with me, but things that were part of the tradition that I handed down to you that I heard from the disciples. So what you heard me teach that originated with me and revelation that I had. And also things that I handed on to you from others. And also what you heard from me i.e. I believe in private conversation. And what you saw.

The discipleship in the New Testament was a call on the part of a teacher to a disciple into relationship with the teacher. It wasn’t just listen to my words, but I want to call you into relationship.

As a pastor of a church this size, it is impossible for me to call even 1% of you into close relationship. Jesus only had twelve disciples and he spent his life with those twelve. And so I believe that we need many, many people who fulfill this role in our lives of talking to us. We hear their teaching and then we get to be in informal conversations with them. We also get to watch the way they live.

One of the things that I have believed in for years is what I call “weight-lifting” discipleship. I get an opportunity with guys that I want to disciple, to influence, not only just from them hearing me on Sunday morning, but I want to influence their values and the way they think and what is happening in their lives—I take them to the gym. And

when you place a lot of weight on someone's chest and begin talking with them about attitudes, they tend to listen to you.

See, Paul is saying I want you to move from your thinking to right actions. In the Vineyard we talk about not only having the message right, but having the ministry right. The kingdom of God is not just words, it is activities. Friends, the proof of the pudding is always in the tasting. What we say we believe, according to the Bible, always turns on what we do. Do you know that the Bible's test for whether your faith is real or not is based on what you are putting into practice?

The difference between an intellectual ascent and real faith has to do with what we practice. We must practice the faith. Blessing does not come into our lives just because we have right thinking. Blessing also requires right action. God doesn't walk with people whose thoughts are right, but whose behavior is wrong. He walks with those whose thoughts and actions are right.

Jesus said that there will be a lot of people who on the Day of Judgment will come to him and say, "Lord, Lord..." He said, "How can you call me 'Lord, Lord' and not do what I tell you to do?"

The difference between a wise and a foolish person has to do with whether we put the words of Jesus into practice. That is what he said in Matthew 7. The foolish man hears the words, maybe can outline and memorize, maybe he can even spit the words back. Maybe he knows good grammar. Maybe he has gone to seminary and understands the way the words were put together. But Jesus says that if that person doesn't take the words of Jesus and put them into practice, he is like a man who builds his house on the sand.

And on the other hand, you only are considered wise if you take Christ's words and you actually do them. You actually apply the whole counsel of God to the way you are going to live. To the way you are going to raise your kids. The way you are going to relate in your marriage. What is going to come out of your mouth? Whether you are going to gossip or not. Your attitude toward the church. Your attitude toward God. Your attitude toward your boss.

The bottom line, Paul says, is that blessing comes on your life and through your life by right thinking and right actions.