

1. The Book of Philippians—An Introduction

It's All In Your Head

A message by Pastor Phil Ballmaier

(3-12-23)

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Last week we finished our study in the Gospel of John. It was a verse-by-verse study—which is the standard style of teaching we do here at Calvary Chapel.

This morning, I'd like to start a new study, in a new book—but I'd like to do it differently than any other study I've ever done here at Calvary. Instead of going verse-by-verse—I'd like to do a topical study through an entire book of the New Testament.

Every book in the New Testament has a theme—which is especially true with the epistles.

I prayed about this and thought it might be beneficial to build a series of messages around the main theme of the epistle to the Philippians—which is joy. But when you realize that Paul wrote this letter while he was a prisoner in Rome—it gives us a deeper appreciation for the theme.

It's easy to be joyful when you're in the midst of blessings—but when you find yourself joyful in the midst of adversity and suffering—well, that's something else entirely.

There has never been a time, in my life, when Christians need to be encouraged and uplifted, as they do right now in our nation's history and part of that is by being reminded that joy is the birthright of the children of God!

A depressed Christian is an oxymoron (like jumbo shrimp). Hopelessness and depression come from the devil—whereas hope and joy come from knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

Before we get into this incredible epistle—let me give you a little background. The epistle to the Philippians is one of four epistles that Paul wrote from prison in Rome—where he spent two years waiting to stand before Caesar to present his case. (Explain)

- While he was there, he wrote Ephesians, Colossians and Philemon probably all around the same time (early in A.D. 60)—while it appears that he wrote Philippians later, near the end of 61 A.D.
- And so, **Paul wrote Philippians while waiting to stand trial**—a trial that could very well have ended in his execution—and yet **the theme of this epistle is joy in the Lord.**
- And the reason Philippians is called the epistle of joy is because **Paul uses the word 'joy' and 'rejoice' 16 times in these four chapters.**

REFLECTION: How was it that Paul could have so much joy while in such a terrible place (jail) with his very life on the line?

Well, **Paul had a secret**—a secret he had learned (and honed) over his years as a Christian. A secret he shares with the Philippian Christians (and us)—as we will see in this epistle.

I'll give you a 'heads-up' (no pun intended)—it has to do with your *mind* (not in a weird metaphysical kind of sense)—**it has to do with what you allow to dominate your thinking. Very simply, Paul's secret was that he learned to fill his mind with Jesus.**

- We see this clearly in the first chapter alone where **Paul uses "Christ" or "Jesus Christ" 17 times**—which figures out to more than once every two verses!
- So even though **Paul talks about joy quite a bit in this epistle—he talks about Jesus more!** In so doing, he reveals to us that the secret of joy in the life of a child of God is to have our minds focused on Jesus Christ.

Jesus was the reason Paul had so much joy in the midst of his difficult circumstances—and **Jesus is the secret to us having joy** in our circumstances as well—no matter how difficult they can sometimes be!

One author rightly pointed out—

"How much Christians need to learn this. There is so much bickering in Christian circles, so much complaining, so much unhappiness. This was never meant to be. Christians were meant to be filled with love and joy and peace—in short, with all the virtues that are the result of the life of Christ within the Christian...To be filled with Christ is the secret of real Christian living. It is the secret of true joy."

So, once again, the secret of having joy in the Christian life (along with all the other spiritual virtues God wants for us)—starts in the mind, with the way you think.

- But that really shouldn't surprise us because *everything* in the Christian life starts in the mind.
- You might be thinking—*"What does that mean?"* Well, the first place the gospel takes up residence—is in the mind. After the gospel is presented to a person—it 'lodges' in their mind where it is '*chewed on*' (mulled over)—where the person evaluates the validity of what they've just heard, or in the case of a gospel tract—read.

At some point, the gospel message is either believed or rejected. If it is believed in the *mind*—it is then brought into the *heart* where it is made a part of that person's core-convictions.

- Understand, 'core-convictions' are not just *beliefs*—they are passionate beliefs that change a person's life.
- **Convictions they are willing to die for** (not just Christians but others are also willing to die for what they believe in like: Muslims and Communists etc.).

Let me put it this way—the mind is the 'narthex' you might say—the entryway leading into the heart.

Many churches (especially older churches) were built with a narthex ('a small inside porch or patio') that you entered from the street—and then from there you entered into the sanctuary of the church.

The mind is like a narthex that is entered into through 2 primary entry-points—the eyes and the ears.

- However, I'll warn you that there are other ways for spirit beings to enter the mind—through things like hallucinogenic drugs like LSD.
- But then there are *metaphysical* portals into the mind like: T.M. (transcendental meditation), visualization, Ouija Boards, Tarot Cards, and contemplative prayer—just to name a few.
- For many, just like a person receives the gospel into their mind and then into their heart where it becomes a passionate belief—there are many people today doing the same thing with the occult and other demonic belief systems.

Let me stop and say this—you may never have thought about this, but **the mind is ground zero for spiritual warfare.**

REFLECTION: Have you ever met someone or heard of someone who was willing to die for their convictions?

**God wants to get a hold of a person's thinking to first of all—
save them, and then,
secondly, to sanctify them.**

The devil wants to control their thinking to keep them away from God and living in sin—to ultimately destroy them (forever in hell).

Paul the Apostle had something important to say on this subject that we really need to understand:

Ephesians 4:17 (NKJV)

¹⁷This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk [live] as the rest of the Gentiles [unbelievers] walk, in the futility of their mind.

Here Paul is admonishing believers to stop living the old life of sin like unbelievers who do so because of the "futility of their mind"—and to start living new lives of holiness and purity for God.

The phrase **"futility of their mind"** means the *"empty-headedness of worldly thinking"*. The Bible teaches that the power to live a changed life comes from the Holy Spirit working through **a changed (clean) heart.**

But David prayed, *"Create in me a clean heart—O God"* because he knew he couldn't create a clean heart within himself.

We don't have the power to change our *hearts*—but we do have **the power to change our minds—it's called 'repentance.'** The word **"repent"** in the Greek literally means—*"to have a change of mind"*.

- If I stop *thinking* that certain behaviors that God condemns in His Word are okay to do—in other words if I stop justifying sinful activities and bad habits.
- If I change my *mind* about the way I’m living, and I cry out to God for His help and strength—if I change my *mind* through repentance, God will change my *heart* through the new birth—and a changed heart always leads to a changed *life*!

Paul is telling us here in Ephesians 4 that the main difference between Christians and non-Christians (yes one has the Holy Spirit and the other does not—that’s the main difference)—but in addition to that, **the main difference between Christians and non-Christians is in the way they—think.**

Once a person repents (has a change of mind) and receives Jesus as their Savior they become a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17)—and instantly receive a new nature—in other words—a new heart!

- **But we still have the ‘old heart’** (the old fallen nature we inherited from Adam) within us (Galatians 5:16-17).

Now, which of these two ‘hearts’ (the old nature or new nature) will control our lives depends on how we *think*—even as Solomon said, “*As a man thinks within himself* (here the mind is in view)—*so is he!*” (Proverbs 23:7)

REFLECTION: How might you explain “Repentance” and “New Heart” to a non-Christian?

And that is why we are commanded as Christians to stop thinking like the world and to start thinking like the redeemed children of God we now are—in Christ!

Romans 12:2 (NKJV)

² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind...

Romans 12:2 (NLT)

² Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think...

Ephesians 4:21-23 (NLT)

²¹ Since you have heard about Jesus and have learned the truth that comes from him, ²² throw off your old sinful nature and your former way of life, which is corrupted by lust and deception. ²³ Instead, let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes.

The main way our thoughts are renewed or changed as Christians—is by listening to, reading, studying, and meditating on the God’s Word:

Psalms 119:9, 11 (NKJV)

⁹ How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word...

¹¹ Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You!

- **God's Word teaches us that godly living always flows from godly thinking**—which is only possible by the renewing of your mind through the Word of God. I am absolutely convinced that the reason so many Christians are living worldly lives (and in the process have no joy and peace)—is because they're still thinking worldly thoughts!
- **Their minds are still conformed to this world's way of thinking because they have not allowed them to be transformed by the renewing that comes from God's Word.** That doesn't mean that carnal Christians aren't reading the Word of God or going to Bible study at all (although I doubt many of them are).
- It simply means that **the teaching of God's Word is not being allowed to go from their head to their heart** where it becomes a part of their core-convictions and therefore *living* and *powerful* in its ability to radically transform their life!
- As a Christian, when you go to Bible study and hear the Word of God taught—it enters your mind that's true—but then **you should immediately internalize that teaching and make it a part of the core values of your heart.**

That simply means—you fully intend to live out what you learn because it's God's Word and you reverence it!

You see, when you internalize God's Word—when you hide it in your heart with the intent of living it out in your life—the truth of God's Word energized by the power of the Holy Spirit will give you victory over the sinful attitudes and thinking of this fallen world that you come in contact with on a daily basis.

REFLECTION: What does it mean to start thinking like redeemed children of God?

We have an expression—"Taking it to heart" which refers to this very thing.

James 1:21-22 (NLT)

²¹ So get rid of all the filth and evil in your lives, and humbly accept the word God has planted in your hearts, for it has the power to save your souls. ²² But don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves.

- Now this is all very important to us as Christians because—**most spiritual warfare takes place in the mind for control of your thinking.**

- **Satan wants to control your thinking** because—if he can control the way you think, he can control the way you live. So, the devil wants to flood your mind with images and messages that will destroy your relationship with God **by keeping you brain-washed in his way of thinking**—which James tells us is ‘*earthly, sensual and demonic*’ (James 3:15).
- Now, if he’s successful (**which means if you allow it**)—it will manifest itself in a love for the things of the world more than in a love for the things of God (which becomes a kind of ‘litmus test’ to see how much you are allowing the devil to control your thinking—what do you love more, God or the world?).
- If you **find yourself loving the world and the things of the world more than God** (how do you know—ask yourself what is controlling and consuming your life—i.e., ‘*what gets you up in the morning and out the door—what is your passion in life—your career, your business, making money—or loving and serving God?*’)
- If you determine that **the love of the world is consuming you more than a love for God**—it means you have become more of an instrument of Satan than of God in this fallen world—and Satan has won (at least for now) the battle for control of your life.

1 John 2:15-16 (NLT)

¹⁵ Do not love this world nor the things it offers you, for when you love the world, you do not have the love of the Father in you. ¹⁶ For the world offers only a craving for physical pleasure, a craving for everything we see, and pride in our achievements and possessions. These are not from the Father, but are from this world.

That’s why it is imperative that we as Christians constantly be on guard as to what enters our minds.

- If you stay away from the more obvious ways the devil will try to pollute your mind (internet pornography, Facebook romances, Tiktok videos, TV etc.)—then the most dangerous junk never gets into your mind in the first place!
- However, the internet isn’t the only way Satan corrupts people’s minds.

There are many public grade schools, high schools, colleges, and universities that teach ungodly ideologies like naturalism (the foundation of evolution), socialism, communism, pro-LGBTQ doctrines and now things like Equity, Critical Race Theory, and gender fluidity (you are whatever gender you want to be at any given moment).

- But we also see this indoctrination of the devil coming from the movie industry, the music industry and many other avenues and venues that are promoting everything from sexual immorality to occultism to witchcraft, to eastern mysticism etc.

But it’s more than that—godly living is not just the *absence* of what’s bad—but it’s also of the *presence* of what’s good—

Philippians 4:8 (NLT)

⁸ And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise.

Colossians 3:16 (NKJV)

¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly [in your mind and heart] in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

You see, as you fill your mind with God’s Word you begin to think like God thinks—which means you *stop* thinking like the world thinks.

The result? A renewed mind and a transformed life!

- Even as Jesus said, *“Cleanse the inside of the cup and it will overflow and cleanse the outside also.”*
- But if you come to church and hear the Word of God taught but you basically let it go *‘in one ear and out the other’* without any real desire to obey it—then it will do you no good.

REFLECTION: When it comes to Spiritual Warfare and Godly living it’s important to allow God’s word into your thoughts and decisions and to keep Satan’s lies and deceptions out of your mind and lifestyle; how can you win this battle?

The Word of God, although *living* and *powerful* (Hebrews 4:12), will be rendered lifeless and powerless to change *your* life—because you are not really serious about doing all that it says—

Matthew 4:4 (NKJV)
⁴ But He answered and said, “It is written, ‘*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.*’”

So let me return to and restate what I said at the beginning of this message—the **secret of having *joy*—starts in the mind, with the way you think.**

**Everything in the Christian life starts with the way you think about God’s Word
and your willingness to *feed* on it every day and *hide* it in your heart—
then and only then will it transform your life!**

- We are living in very dark and demonic times—where the devil is trying to capture people’s thinking like never before—especially young people who are the most open to new ideas and teachings.

This headline and article appeared in print and in online news sources:

“Dozens of girls hospitalized with 'anxiety' after playing with Ouija boards”
*“Twenty-eight schoolgirls were hospitalized with anxiety attacks after allegedly playing with Ouija boards at their school in Galeras, Colombia.
 The girls reportedly suffered signs of fainting, anxiety and other symptoms and were admitted to a hospital accompanied by parents and school faculty. Info on their diagnoses has not been released.
 Ouija boards, created in the U.S. in 1886, are often referred to as ‘spirit’ or ‘talking boards.’ They are believed to be a way for the living to communicate with the dead.”*

People that get caught up in things like witchcraft, the occult, the New Age and other metaphysical practices are not our enemies. They are searching for truth but have been taken captive by the devil to do his will—

2 Timothy 2:23–26 (NKJV)

²³ But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife. ²⁴ And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, ²⁵ in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, ²⁶ and *that* they may come to their senses *and escape* the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to *do* his will.

But praise God that He is more powerful than the devil, that light is more powerful than darkness—that God’s truth is always more powerful than Satan’s lies!

God’s Word is, and always has been, the only thing that can set people free from the power of the devil and give them a new life in Christ!

➔ **LISTEN/WATCH:** 6-minute video—Jenny Weaver, former witch who now worships Jesus.

If you would like to know more about what it means to be a Jesus-follower— please, reach out to us. It would be our greatest privilege to lead you into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

Reach out to us [here](#).

Want to know more? Click [here](#).