

The Life
of the Mind
and the Love
of God

Think

JOHN PIPER

Foreword by Mark Noll

Think: The Life of the Mind and the Love of God
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Foreword

Among many important benefits from hearing or reading good sermons is the stimulus to think more clearly about God and his ways. When the sermons are about thinking itself, the stimulus is all the stronger.

John Piper's book on thinking is more sermon-like than an actual sermon. Yet because of how it engages the Scriptures and seeks to apply Scripture to real-life questions, the book functions like a good sermon. Its main texts are taken from Proverbs 2 and 2 Timothy 2, an Old Testament passage and a New Testament passage that both urge followers of God to think carefully. Insight and understanding are the goals in Proverbs 2; thinking over what Paul has said to Timothy is the purpose in view in the other passage.

As in good sermons, Piper wants to set these texts in their proper contexts, and this is where the payoff comes. Paul urges Timothy to think carefully, "for the Lord will give you understanding in everything" (2 Tim. 2:7). The author of Proverbs urges careful thought in order to find "silver" and "hidden treasure," which are then defined as "the fear of the Lord" and "the knowledge of God." With that relationship secured—between thinking and finding the knowledge of God—Piper can then develop his arguments that move from Scripture to real-life problems.

The real-life problems are two sides of the same coin. From the one side, spiritually minded people may conclude that since the Holy Spirit is the source of all life and truth, it is not important to work at thinking, reading, and learning. From the other side, intellectually minded people may conclude that since God wants us to think, read, and learn, these activities are supremely important in and of themselves.

Piper strikes hard at both those conclusions. He holds up instead the results of patient biblical exposition ranging through the Scriptures to underscore two alternative truths that speak directly to the contemporary situation. First, against anti-intellectual tendencies, he argues that careful thinking is integral to a full apprehension of the gospel.

Second, against the prideful use of the intellect, he argues that clear thinking following biblical patterns will lead away from self to a full delight in God's grace as the key to every aspect of existence.

Different readers will doubtless find different aspects of Piper's exposition most arresting, but I came away especially provoked to meditate by his efforts to fathom two passages, which I have also pondered. One is Luke 10:21, where Jesus says that God has "hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children." Piper's careful exegesis shows convincingly that Jesus' words are meant to promote humility in the use of all gifts, including intelligence, rather than to deny the intellect. The other passage is 1 Corinthians 1:20, where the apostle Paul says that God has "made foolish the wisdom of the world." Again, careful exegesis shows that the intent of the passage is to differentiate between wisdom used to exalt the creature and wisdom employed to honor the Creator. This conclusion is later summarized in one of Piper's many striking phrases: "The cross is the continental divide between human wisdom and divine wisdom."

The real-life payoff from carefully examining such passages could hardly be more timely. Much in contemporary American life promotes sloppy thinking or the use of careful thinking for human self-promotion. Much in conservative Christian churches promotes suspicion of modern learning or the use of reactionary emotion to replace thinking. Piper sets out the biblical alternative: thinking (as clearly as possible) linked *with* the affections (treasuring God as highest good); respect for the intellect *with* caution against intellectual pride; and commitment to diligent study *with* total reliance on God's grace. For believers, this is the way to go; for unbelievers, this is the way to life.

When the request came to prepare a short foreword for this book, I had to smile at the propitious timing of the Lord. Was it only a coincidence, I wondered, that I was being asked to read John Piper's book on the imperative of Christ-centered thinking in the very days when I was drafting the last words for my sequel to *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, which was published some years ago? The chuckle came because, like John's volume, my book looks to John 1, Hebrews 1, and especially to Colossians 1 for what these passages say about "all things" being cre-

ated in, by, through, and for Jesus Christ. I am also trying to show that careful study is a divinely ordained necessity, but one that should never replace a Christian's total reliance on God's grace. Like John, I am urging believers to be deadly serious about studying the world, but not at all serious about themselves.

My wife, Maggie, wondered if my book, which will be called *Jesus Christ and the Life of the Mind*, would suffer in competition with John's. I responded that there is enough difference to tell them apart. John's biblical exposition is much more extensive, and his exposition dramatizes more powerfully the proper role of hard human thinking in the enjoyment of Christ. My book says a few things about science (especially evolution) that many of John's appreciative readers, and maybe John himself, might not approve. And for my effort at promoting Christ-centered thinking, I make more use of some Catholic thinkers and of the great ancient statements of orthodox Christian faith (the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Chalcedonian Definition of Christ's person).

Yet since the basic message of what I'm trying to say is exactly the same as what you will read in *Think: The Life of the Mind and the Love of God*, I am delighted to commend the book that lies before you and am completely unconcerned if this is the only book you read on this vitally important topic!

It has been my privilege to know John Piper since we were literature majors living in the same dorm at Wheaton College in what now seems close to the dawn of time. It is even more of a privilege to thank God that along different paths through the intervening decades the Lord has led us, on the vital concerns of this book, to the same place.

The point of Christian learning is to understand God's two books—Scripture and the world—and, with that understanding, to glorify God. The pages before you communicate that point very well. Pick them up, read them, test them by the Scriptures, reflect on their portrait of a loving God. In a word, think about it.

—Mark A. Noll
Francis A. McAnaney Professor of History,
University of Notre Dame



If you call out for insight
and raise your voice for understanding,
if you seek it like silver
and search for it as for hidden treasures,
then you will understand the fear of the LORD
and find the knowledge of God.

Proverbs 2:3-5

Introduction

This book is a plea to embrace serious thinking as a means of loving God and people. It is a plea to reject *either-or* thinking when it comes to head and heart, thinking and feeling, reason and faith, theology and doxology, mental labor and the ministry of love. It is a plea to see thinking as a necessary, God-ordained means of knowing God. Thinking is one of the important ways that we put the fuel of knowledge on the fires of worship and service to the world.

Knowing, Treasuring, Living—for the Glory of Christ

The ultimate goal of life is that God be displayed as glorious because of all that he is and all that he has made and done—especially the grace he has shown in the work of Christ. The way we glorify him is by knowing him truly, by treasuring him above all things, and by living in a way that shows he is our supreme treasure.

It is my eager expectation and hope that . . . Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. . . . To depart and be with Christ . . . is far better. . . . I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. (Phil. 1:20–21, 23; 3:8)

Therefore, the main reason God has given us minds is that we might seek out and find all the reasons that exist for treasuring him *in* all things and *above* all things. He created the world so that *through* it and *above* it we might treasure him. The more we see of his surpassing greatness and knowledge and wisdom and power and justice and wrath and mercy and patience and goodness and grace and love, the more we will treasure him. And the more we treasure

him, the more he is consciously and joyfully glorified. The point of this book is that *thinking* is a God-given means to that end.

How Is This Book Different?

There are other books about thinking. Good ones. Here are a few examples of how this one is different. It is less historical than Mark Noll's *Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*,¹ less punchy than Os Guinness's *Fit Bodies Fat Minds*,² less philosophical than J. P. Moreland's *Love Your God with All Your Mind*,³ less vocational than James Sire's *Habits of the Mind*,⁴ and less cultural than Gene Veith's *Loving God with All Your Mind*.⁵

So this book is *less* in lots of ways. What there is *more* of is biblical exposition. That's not a criticism of the other books. They are better than this one in many ways. They are what they were meant to be, and they are good. But I am a preacher—a Bible expositor. Most of my time is spent trying to figure out what the Bible means and how it applies to life. That's what this book will taste like.

Who Is the Book For?

Is it for students? Yes, if you agree with me that everybody should be a student. Meaning number two in the dictionary: STUDENT—"any person who studies, investigates, or examines thoughtfully." It's pretty hard to get through life without examining *something* thoughtfully. But mainly it's for the Christian—in or out of school—who wants to know God better, love him more, and care about people.

¹Mark Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994).

²Os Guinness, *Fit Bodies Fat Minds: Why Evangelicals Don't Think and What to Do About It* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994).

³J. P. Moreland, *Love Your God with All Your Mind: The Role of Reason in the Life of the Soul* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1997).

⁴James W. Sire, *Habits of the Mind: Intellectual Life as a Christian Calling* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000).

⁵Gene Edward Veith Jr., *Loving God with All Your Mind: Thinking as a Christian in the Postmodern World*, rev. ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2003). See also Richard Hughes, *How Christian Faith Can Sustain the Life of the Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001); Clifford Williams, *The Life of the Mind: A Christian Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002).

Yes, I have concerns. For example, I hope this book will help rescue the victims of evangelical pragmatism, Pentecostal short-cuts, pietistic anti-intellectualism, pluralistic conviction aversion, academic gamesmanship, therapeutic Bible evasion, journalistic bite-sizing, musical mesmerizing, YouTube craving, and postmodern Jell-O juggling. In other words, I believe thinking is good for the church in every way.

Not to Overstate the Case

But I hate to sound snooty—which every book on thinking does. So see if this helps. It comes from a philosopher, Nicholas Wolterstorff, which makes its earthiness more compelling. He admits that *over-intellectualism* is a plague just like *anti-intellectualism*. *Over-intellectualism* sounds like this:

If you use your hands or teach those who use their hands . . . you are inferior to those who use only their heads: practicing musicians are inferior to musicologists, painters are inferior to art historians, teachers of business are inferior to economists, teachers of preaching are inferior to theologians. The basic attitude was stated crisply by Aristotle . . . : “We think the master-workers in each craft are more honorable . . . than the manual workers.”⁶

Not so, says Wolterstorff. He adds, “It’s a strange attitude for Christians to hold, since Jesus was the son of a carpenter and since God is represented in the opening pages of Scripture as a maker, not a thinker.”⁷

So I don’t want to overstate the case. It’s not about going to school or getting degrees or having prestige. It’s not about the superiority of intellectuals. It’s about using the means God has given us to know him, love him, and serve people. *Thinking* is one of those means. I would like to encourage you to think, but not to be too impressed with yourself when you do.

⁶Nicholas Wolterstorff, “Thinking with Your Hands” in *Books and Culture* (March/April 2009): 30.

⁷*Ibid.* Of course, when God speaks things into being, his word is virtually the same as his thought.

The Bible says, “If you . . . raise your voice for understanding, if you seek it like silver . . . then you will . . . find the knowledge of God” (Prov. 2:3–6). I need all the help I can get to love the knowledge of God more than the profits of silver. I assume you do too. So I wrote this book to remind myself of *the place of thinking in the pursuit of God*. Like a little echo of Calvin and Augustine, I say with them, “I count myself one of the number of those who write as they learn and learn as they write.”⁸ If you join me, I hope you find it helpful.

Mapping the Rest of the Book

If you’re the type that gets help from a road map before you travel, read the rest of this introduction. If you prefer more surprises as you go along, skip it. Here’s a sketch of where we are going.

I tell my own story in chapter 1. One of the reasons is that it seems honest to expose my background and influences and struggles. This gives you the chance to put my thoughts in a context and come to terms with some of my limitations. Another reason is that my own experience is, I think, typical of many evangelicals in the tensions I experienced in the awakening of the life of the mind. You may find yourself encouraged to follow a fellow struggler. Third, most of the issues the book raises emerge from my own interaction with God’s world and God’s Word. So my journey serves as a suitable portal onto the panorama we will study.

Chapter 2 tells the story of how Jonathan Edwards made a huge impact on my experience of the life of the mind. Though he has been dead over 250 years, his impact is still enormous on many thinkers today. My story of encountering him forms the basis for the rest of the book. What he provided for me was the deepest foundation for how thinking and feeling relate to each other. He did this through his vision of the Trinitarian nature of God.

⁸This is the way Calvin closed his “John Calvin to the Reader” at the beginning of his *Institutes*. The quote is also found in Augustine’s *Letters* cxliii.2 (MPL 33, 585; tr. NPNF I, 490). John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 5.

In chapter 3 we turn from the more or less autobiographical focus in clarifying the aim of the book (chapters 1 and 2) to what I actually mean by the task of *thinking*. What I have in mind mainly is the amazing act of *reading*. The best reading of the most insightful literature (especially the Bible) involves serious thinking. That's the point of chapter 3.

Chapters 4 and 5 attempt to show *that* thinking functions (chapter 4) and *how* thinking functions (chapter 5) in the process of coming to faith in Jesus. One might infer from the pervasive effects of sin in laming our minds that thinking has no significant role in how God creates saving faith. But, in fact, we will see the crucial role of thinking both in coming to faith and in sustaining faith.

Having clarified the role of thinking in how we come to faith in Christ (chapters 4 and 5), we will turn in chapter 6 to the role of thinking in how we fulfill the Great Commandment—to love God. Jesus said that we should love God with all our *mind* (Matt. 22:37). Some have treated this as if it means “think hard and think accurately, and that act of thinking is loving God.” But I doubt that.

I will suggest that loving God with the mind means that *our thinking is wholly engaged to do all it can to awaken and express the heartfelt fullness of treasuring God above all things*. Treasuring God is the essence of loving him, and the mind serves this love by comprehending (imperfectly and partially, but truly) the truth and beauty and worth of the Treasure. What is the biblical basis for this understanding of loving God with our minds? That's what chapter 6 is about.

But everything in chapters 1 through 6 would be pointless if real knowing is impossible, or if nothing is there to know. A common notion today is that knowledge of things outside our own mind is impossible. One of the names for this attitude is relativism. In chapters 7 and 8, I try to explain what this is and what Jesus thought about it. I argue in chapter 7 that relativism is neither intellectually compelling nor morally upright. Then in chapter 8, I try to build up

your immune system against the intellectual virus of relativism by inoculating you, if you're willing, with seven harmful and immoral aspects of the disease. My aim is a deeply peaceful confidence and freedom to see and savor and speak the truth whose treasures are hidden in Jesus Christ.

But this hope-filled attitude toward the pursuit of Christ-exalting truth through the use of the mind has not been the mark of recent Christian history—at least not in America. A pervasive anti-intellectualism hangs in the air. In chapter 9, I try to give you a sense of this atmosphere. One way to look at chapters 9 through 11 is that they are my effort to show that the supposed biblical pillars for anti-intellectualism are very shaky. But the biblical foundations for a robust use of the mind for the sake of loving God and man are deep and strong.

Two passages of Scripture seem, on the face of it, to promote anti-intellectualism. One is Luke 10:21 where Jesus says, “You have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children.” We deal with this in chapter 10. The other is 1 Corinthians 1:20: “Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?” This is our focus in chapter 11. These two passages have become pillars in the house of anti-intellectualism. It is striking how similar these passages are in what they teach. But they prove to be shaky pillars indeed.

The upshot of our study of these “pillars” is that they are not warnings against careful, faithful, rigorous, coherent thinking in the pursuit of God. In fact, the way Jesus and Paul spoke these warnings compels us to engage in serious thinking even to understand them. And what we find is that pride is no respecter of persons—the serious thinkers may be humble. And the careless mystics may be arrogant.

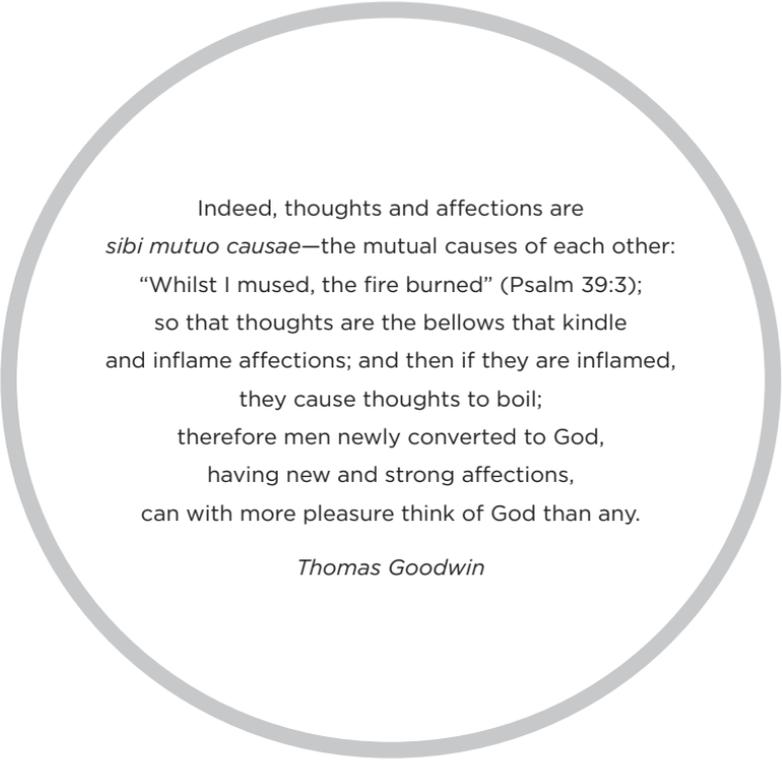
The aim of this book is to encourage serious, faithful, humble thinking that leads to the true knowledge of God, which leads to loving him, which overflows in loving others. There is such a way of thinking that avoids the pitfalls of pride both among the common

man and the most educated. In chapter 12 we catch a glimpse of it in Paul's amazing warning against the knowledge that puffs up. The focus here is on 1 Corinthians 8:1–3 and Romans 10:1–4. The lesson of chapter 12 is that thinking is dangerous and indispensable. Without a profound work of grace in the heart, thinking puffs up. But with that grace, thinking opens the door of humble knowledge. And that knowledge is the fuel of the fire of love for God and man. But if we turn away from serious thinking in our pursuit of God, that fire will eventually go out.

Finally, in chapter 13 we expand on the implication of chapter 12, that all thinking—all learning, all education, all schooling, formal or informal, simple or sophisticated—exists for the love of God and the love of man. We take the truth of 1 Corinthians 8:1–3 and apply it to the knowledge of God through his other “book,” the created world of nature and human life.

The upshot is that the task of all Christian scholarship—not just biblical studies—is to study reality as a manifestation of God's glory, to speak and write about it with accuracy, and to savor the beauty of God in it, and to make it serve the good of man. It is an abdication of scholarship when Christians do academic work with little reference to God. If all the universe and everything in it exist by the design of an infinite, personal God, to make his manifold glory known and loved, then to treat any subject without reference to God's glory is not scholarship but insurrection.

In summary then, all branches of learning—and this book about thinking—exist ultimately for the purposes of knowing God, loving God, and loving man through Jesus Christ. And since loving man means ultimately helping him see and savor God in Christ forever, it is profoundly right to say all thinking, all learning, all education, and all research is for the sake of knowing God, loving God, and showing God. “For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen” (Rom. 11:36).



Indeed, thoughts and affections are
sibi mutuo causae—the mutual causes of each other:

“Whilst I mused, the fire burned” (Psalm 39:3);
so that thoughts are the bellows that kindle
and inflame affections; and then if they are inflamed,
they cause thoughts to boil;
therefore men newly converted to God,
having new and strong affections,
can with more pleasure think of God than any.

Thomas Goodwin

My Pilgrimage

All my life I have lived with the tension between thinking and feeling and doing.

The Move of '79

After twenty-two years of nonstop formal education and six years of college teaching, I left academia for the pastorate at age thirty-four. That was almost thirty years ago. I remember the night of October 14, 1979, when I wrote seven pages in my journal about the crisis in my soul concerning college teaching versus pastoral ministry. It was one of the most important days of my life—I can see that now.

It seemed to me then that these things—thinking and feeling and doing—would perhaps find a better balance in the church than in school. By “better” I mean a balance that would fit my gifts, and God’s call, and people’s needs, and the purposes of God for this world. I think I did the right thing. But I don’t mean it would be right for everybody.

In fact, one of the purposes of this book is to celebrate the indispensable place of education in the cause of Christ. If every faculty member in the university or seminary did what I did, it would be tragic. I love what God did for me in academia for twenty-eight years, from ages six to thirty-four.

26 Clarifying the Aim of the Book

I am not among the number who looks back with dismay on what I was, or wasn't, taught. If I had it to do over again, I would take almost all the same classes with the same teachers and teach almost all the same classes. I didn't expect college and seminary and graduate school to teach me things that have to be learned on the job. If I have stumbled, it wasn't their fault.

The Painful Joy of Academia

Nor did I leave academia because it was spiritually stifling. On the contrary. All through college, and more so through seminary, and then even more in my six years of college teaching, my reading and thinking and writing made my heart burn with zeal for God. I have never been one of those who found the heart shrivel as God and his Word are known better. Putting more knowledge in my head about God and his ways was like throwing wood in the furnace of my worship. For me, seeing has meant savoring. And the clearer the seeing, the sweeter the savoring.

Not that there weren't tears. Some of my notions about God went up in the flames of biblical truth. It hurt. I would put my face in my hands some afternoons and weep with the pain of confusion. But, as the Native American proverb says, the soul would have no rainbow if the eye had no tears. Some joys are only possible on the other side of sorrow. It is true when the preacher says, "In much wisdom is much vexation, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow" (Eccles. 1:18). But it is worth it.

And I don't mean that the seeing which led to savoring was easy. The work involved in figuring out what the Bible means when it talks about God is often agonizingly difficult. I know something of Luther's agonizing statement, "I beat importunately upon Paul at that place, most ardently desiring to know what St. Paul wanted."¹ I simply mean that when all is said and done, the work of thinking led me again and again to worship. Academia was life-giving for me.

¹John Dillenberger, ed. *Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1961), 12.

Enflamed to Preach by Romans 9

I left in search of a new life of exultation over the truth. There is an irony in the fact that what led to my leaving was a sabbatical in which I wrote a book on Romans 9.² *The Justification of God* is the most complicated, intellectually demanding book I have ever written. It deals with the most difficult theological issues and one of the hardest texts in the Bible. Yet, ironically, the research and writing of this book was what God used to enflame my heart for preaching and pastoral ministry. Writing this most difficult book about God's sovereignty was not dispiriting; it was incendiary. This was the God I wanted more than anything to proclaim—not just explain.

Yet it was the explaining that set fire to the proclaiming. I have not forgotten that. That is the main point of this book. I haven't forgotten because it is still true. "As I mused," says the psalmist, "the fire burned; then I spoke with my tongue" (Ps. 39:3). Musing. Brooding. Pondering. Thinking. That has been for me the pathway to seeing and savoring and singing and speaking—and staying. Year after year, this has been my work—prayer-saturated, Spirit-dependent *thinking* about what God has revealed of himself to provide fuel for passion and preaching.

Thinking is indispensable on the path to passion for God. Thinking is not an end in itself. Nothing but God himself is finally an end in itself. Thinking is not the goal of life. Thinking, like non-thinking, can be the ground for boasting. Thinking, without prayer, without the Holy Spirit, without obedience, without love, will puff up and destroy (1 Cor. 8:1). But thinking under the mighty hand of God, thinking soaked in prayer, thinking carried by the Holy Spirit, thinking tethered to the Bible, thinking in pursuit of more reasons to praise and proclaim the glories of God, thinking in the service of love—such thinking is indispensable in a life of fullest praise to God.

²John Piper, *The Justification of God: A Theological and Exegetical Study of Romans 9:1–23* (1983; repr. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993).

The Tension

And yet the tension remains. Thinking and feeling and doing jostle each other in my life, jockeying for more room. There never seems to be a satisfactory proportion. Should I be doing more, thinking more, feeling more, expressing more feeling? No doubt this discomfort is owing partly to quirks in my personality, factors in my background, and the remaining corruption in my heart.

But this tension is also due to a history of over-intellectualism and anti-intellectualism in the church; and it is due partly to a complexity in the Bible itself. Too often, the church has been ambivalent about “the life of the mind.” America, in particular, has a long history of evangelical suspicion of education and intellectual labor. The most notable narration of this story for evangelicals is Mark Noll’s *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, whose first sentence is, “The scandal of the evangelical mind is that there is not much of an evangelical mind.”³

The Lament of the Thinkers

Thirty years before Noll’s indictment Harry Blamires wrote, “In contradistinction to the secular mind, no vital Christian mind plays fruitfully, as a coherent and recognizable influence, upon our social, political, or cultural life. . . . There is no Christian mind.”⁴ And since Noll, others have joined the lament. J. P. Moreland has a chapter called, “How We Lost the Christian Mind and Why We Must Recover It.”⁵ And Os Guinness has written *Fit Bodies Fat Minds: Why Evangelicals Don’t Think and What to Do About It*.⁶

These friends are describing not just the world but the home I

³Mark Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 3.

⁴Harry Blamires, *The Christian Mind: How Should a Christian Think?* (London: SPCK, 1963), 6.

⁵J. P. Moreland, *Love Your God with All Your Mind: The Role of Reason in the Life of the Soul* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1997), 19–40.

⁶Os Guinness, *Fit Bodies Fat Minds: Why Evangelicals Don’t Think and What to Do About It* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994). “At root, evangelical anti-intellectualism is both a scandal and a sin. It is a scandal in the sense of being an offense and a stumbling block that needlessly hinders serious people from considering the Christian faith and coming to Christ. It is a sin because it is a refusal, contrary to the first of Jesus’ two great commandments, to love the Lord our God with our minds” (10–11).

grew up in. As far as the world goes, R. C. Sproul has written that “we live in what may be the most anti-intellectual period in the history of Western civilization.”⁷ As far as my fundamentalist upbringing goes, Noll says that for the kind of thinking that embraces society, the arts, the human person, and nature—“for that kind of thinking the habits of mind fundamentalism encouraged can only be called a disaster.”⁸ It is not surprising perhaps then that I find myself pulled in different directions. For even Noll admits that there are amazing accomplishments for the good of the world brought about by the very impulses which, in part, undermined the deeper life of the mind.⁹

Knowledge: Dangerous and Liberating

But whatever I inherited in the atmosphere of my world and my home, the more mature tension I experience between thinking and feeling and doing is due largely to the Bible itself. There are some sentences in God’s Word that make knowledge sound dangerous and others that make it sound glorious. For example, on the one hand, it says, “Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up” (1 Cor. 8:1 NET); and, on the other hand, it says, “You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:32). Knowing is dangerous. Knowing is liberating. And that is not an isolated paradox.

So what I want to do in this book is take you with me into the Bible itself to see how God has ordered this act of thinking in relation to other crucial acts in life. How does it relate to our believing, and worshiping, and living in this world? Why are there so many warnings about “knowledge” (1 Tim. 6:20), and “the wisdom of this world” (1 Cor. 3:19), and “philosophy” (Col. 2:8), and the “debased mind” (Rom. 1:28), and “the wise and understanding” who can’t see (Luke 10:21), and those whose understanding is darkened (Eph. 4:18)?

⁷R. C. Sproul, “Burning Hearts Are Not Nourished by Empty Heads,” *Christianity Today* (September 3, 1982), 100.

⁸Noll, *Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, 132.

⁹*Ibid.*, 3. “An extraordinary range of virtues is found among the sprawling throngs of evangelical Protestants in North America, including great sacrifice in spreading the message of salvation in Jesus Christ, open-hearted generosity to the needy, heroic personal exertion on behalf of troubled individuals, and the unheralded sustenance of countless church and parachurch communities.”

30 Clarifying the Aim of the Book

“Think Over What I Say”

In spite of all these warnings, the overwhelming message of the Bible is that knowing the truth is crucial. And *thinking*—eagerly and humbly using the mind God gave us, and using it well—is essential to knowing the truth.

Two passages of Scripture provide the main point of this book. The first is 2 Timothy 2:7, where Paul says to Timothy, “Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.” The command is that he think, consider, use his mind to try to understand what he means. And the reason Paul gives for this thinking is this: “For the Lord will give you understanding.” Paul does not put these in tension: thinking on the one side and receiving the gift of understanding from God on the other side. They go together. Thinking is essential on the path to understanding. But understanding is a gift of God. That’s the point of this book.

“Seek It Like Silver”

The other passage is Proverbs 2:1–6. I’ll boil it down to two verses to make it easier to see how similar it is to 2 Timothy 2:7. “If you . . . raise your voice for understanding, if you seek it like silver . . . then you will . . . find the knowledge of God. For the LORD gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.” The point is that we should seek understanding like a miser seeks silver. We should use our minds with eagerness and skill. What is the reason given? The same one Paul gave: “For the LORD gives wisdom.” They go together—our seeking understanding and God’s giving it. Seeking it like silver is essential to finding. But finding is a gift of God. That is the point of this book.

A story about Benjamin Warfield may make the point clear. Warfield taught at Princeton Seminary for thirty-four years until his death in 1921. He reacted with dismay toward those who saw opposition between prayer for divine illumination and rigorous thinking about God’s written Word. In 1911 he gave an address to

students with this exhortation: “Sometimes we hear it said that ten minutes on your knees will give you a truer, deeper, more operative knowledge of God than ten hours over your books. ‘What!’ is the appropriate response, ‘than ten hours over your books, on your knees?’”¹⁰ *Both-and*. Not *either-or*. That’s the vision I am trying to encourage in this book.

Now, to Introduce a Friend and Lay a Foundation

In one sense the next chapter is an extension of this one because it tells the story of how one man made a huge impact on my experience of this *both-and* life. You could say it is a tribute to a friend I never knew personally. In fact, he’s been dead over 250 years. He became for me an inspiration to be this kind of *both-and* person.

But in another sense, the next chapter is the basis for the rest of the book. What this friend provided for me was the deepest foundation for how thinking and feeling relate to each other. He did this through his vision of the Trinitarian nature of God. I hope you benefit from his vision as much as I have.

¹⁰Benjamin Warfield, “The Religious Life of Theological Students,” in *The Princeton Theology*, ed. Mark Noll (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 263.

We often pit thinking
and feeling against each other,
especially when it comes to the Christian
experience. Glorifying God with our minds and
hearts, however, is not *either-or*, but *both-and*.
Focusing on the life of the mind will help you to
know God better, love him more, and care for
the world. This book will help you think about
thinking, and about how the heart and
mind glorify God together.

