



Thinking God-Thoughts

Ephesians 1:15-23

Grace Church | 10.17.21

A.W. Tozer begins his book *The Knowledge of the Holy* with a piercing quote: “What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.” Currently I teach a class on Biblical Interpretation to 9th graders at Valor Preparatory Academy. I have them for just two hours a week, so I try to make the most of it. And recently I asked them to write the first one to three words that came to their mind when they think of God and put them on the board. They had no trouble with this: most put things like “love” or “kindness” but also “holiness” or “greatness”. Then I shared Tozer’s insight, and the question I asked was “why?” Why is what we think about God the most important thing about us? They had trouble answering that question. Let me try to give you an answer. Our knowledge of God is the most important thing about us for two reasons:

First, because there is no greater or higher thought than that of God.

In other words, we are all built with an irresistible magnetic pull towards transcendence. Every culture and every language has a word for god or deity: it is their most significant word. If God is truly divine and uncaused, then he is our highest thought. To have any knowledge of him at all is a serious matter. To assign any thought as a “God-thought” is to elevate that thought higher than anything. God-thoughts are the most important thoughts we can have, because they move beyond us into what is transcendent and beyond us.

Second, because in the end all our feelings, actions, and decisions will be guided by our highest thoughts.

Your God-thoughts don’t just stay thoughts, though. Humans are not robotic—it is in our nature to be driven by our thoughts, not just instinct. Even when we make a “thoughtless” decision, we are still driven by what we value: foolishness is not thoughtlessness, it’s foolish thinking. There is no way to actually clear your brain of thoughts. You are driven by the highest, most powerful thoughts you have. We may call these our “God-thoughts”. So no doubt that if our “God-thoughts” are our highest thoughts, they will drive our lives. What we think about God is the most important thing about us.

Which means that we should care very deeply about what we think about God. So how do we think right thoughts about God? I believe the answer is found in **verse 18**. We need the eyes of our hearts enlightened. We need knowledge: but not just of the head, but of the heart. We need



wisdom, revelation. How do we think rightly about God? We need God to show us, to know us. And this is exactly what Paul outlines in **verses 15-23**. After his great eulogy, praising God for all the blessings we receive in Christ, he knows that those blessings only change the life of the Christian when they become our God-thoughts. His heart burns with pastoral passion, that the church in Ephesus would not just *acknowledge* God, but they would truly *know* him. That their understanding of the blessings of the gospel would not just be head knowledge but heart knowledge, not just given to them as words on a page but written into the fabric of their experience.

So let's pick up in **verse 15-16**. I understand where Paul is coming from. The Ephesians are nowhere near perfect, but he is proud of them. He has heard that they have shown the most important evidence of their faith: they love one another. For all their issues, they love each other. So, his response is to give thanks for them continually.

Let me pause to say something similar. I am proud of you, church. We are not perfect, and we are not to the end yet. But we can be proud of our love for one another. In the last 3+ years since I have been at Grace Church, I have not just heard but seen your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love towards all the saints. Let me point out two ways:

1. You welcome one another as Christ has welcomed us.
2. You sacrifice for one another as Christ has sacrificed for us.

Keep going—so that we may not cease to give thanks for one another. Paul's second action in this proud moment is not thanks but prayer. He has one, multifaceted prayer for the Ephesians, a prayer that should be a model for us of how we should pray for one another, of the great need of the church of God. We find the content in **verses 17-18**. Paul's prayer is simple, although the concepts are layered: he prays that the Triune God—you see it there with reference to the Lord Jesus, the Father, of Glory, and the Spirit of Wisdom—would enlighten the church to know him. He prays that our "God-thoughts" would be beyond all imagination, that we would know God from the gut.

Let's dare to pray in this way—that what David calls: "the meditations of our hearts" would be lifted from the often drab monotony of this world and fixed squarely on the glory of the Triune God. That's a bold prayer. But notice, it's something we are called to pray. The knowledge of God here is not a one time thing, as if it is one experience that we get, some eastern enlightenment or nirvana. No, it is a consistent, constant filling. Paul acknowledges the Ephesians have faith—but they are still in need of knowledge of God. Conversion is the point where our God thoughts finally get traction. But the beauty is, they never have to stop. We will never fully comprehend the end of God—he is a magnificent bottomless well, an ocean of being.

But here, in Paul's prayer, we can start with asking God for three God-thoughts: the hope of his calling, the riches of his inheritance, and the greatness of his power. Each God thought will grow a bit larger, culminating in the last which ties it all together.



God Thought 1: The Hope of his Calling

This is Paul's first desire in **verse 18**. In many ways, this is a review. Remember in verses 3-6, we saw what this calling was. It was a calling to holiness, a calling to adoption, an election from before time began. This is the calling of God for his people—to be son/heirs with Christ and in Christ. And yet, hope is a fickle thing, isn't it? Life tricks us again and again into thinking hope is worthless, that it is not a thought worth having. We hope for a sickness to subside, and our hope seems in vain when the cancer takes hold. We hope for a child to be born—and it never comes, or it dies before we can hold it—and so our hope seems in vain. We hope for a life of peace and joy, and when our life is not what we expected, hope seems to laugh at us.

The reason, however, that hope seems dead and worthless is because we place eternal hope on things that are not. We all must die. There is no hope for eternal life in this age and in this time. Peace and joy are not impenetrable realities. As long as sin lives in the world, our longing for perfection will never truly be met. The only way for hope to be worthwhile is if there is some sort of great victory, some way in which we may never be let down. And that is the power of the gospel: in the good news of Jesus we have a hope that will never put us to shame, and it reorients all our other hopes. We can hope for a baby, and even in sadness, our hope is not in vain. Because the fulfillment of our hope is not last, it's just coming later. We can hope for a joy--filled, peaceful life, and when that life is interrupted by pain and chaos, we don't have to jettison our hope, to pretend like we never should have hoped. Why? Because we don't hope in this life alone. The calling we receive is not in time: it's eternal—before time began. That is a hopeful calling.

God Thought 2: The Riches of his Inheritance

The second thought is right after this in **verse 18**. Again, this is a bit of review isn't it, from the previous praise of God's blessing. He gifts us with himself—a vision of his glory so transformative that we are made perfectly able to live in the perfect world he is creating for us. The Scripture talks about inheritance as a people and place: a nation and a promised land. Both are coming for you in Christ.

What does it mean that the inheritance coming is a “glorious” one? After all, this may not be how you describe the inheritance you could be set to receive from a relative. “Meager” or “lavish” depending on the amount maybe, but not “glorious”. The inheritance of God is glorious because it is not trafficked in dollars and cents, but in divine beauty. “Glory” is simply a way to describe the diffusion of all of God's attributes. It's awe, it's magnitude, it's joy. The reason our inheritance is glorious is because God is glorious. Jonathan Edwards described the power of God's glory like this:

“God is arrayed with an infinite brightness, which fills with excess joy and delight, so that the joy and pleasure in beholding him would be too strong for a frail nature.”



In other words, if we were to fully drink up the glory of God, we would explode. Why? Because it was too terrible? No, because it was too good. And this is what is coming for us. A glorious inheritance—a draught of God himself, and the only reason we don't explode is because he is making us able to take in bits of his glory by adopting us for holiness in the Son.

God Thought 3: The Greatness of his Power

Now we get to the main thrust of the section. The God-thoughts of hope and inheritance are powerful enough to change us, but there is one thought that will make them come alive. It's this in **verse 19**: that God's power and greatness is immeasurable. This thought should raise our standards of expectation. God is not limited by time or space. If he wants to bless us, he can and will. Knowing God means we are stepping into the knowledge of a being far different than us. His ground is holy, because his powerful greatness is unlimited. The higher our thoughts of God, the greater our satisfaction will be when God surpasses them. When was the last time you prayed to be awed by the immeasurable power of God?

Now, briefly let me help you think through the concept of power in relation to God. The word "power" is not typically seen as a positive, particularly in today's culture. Why? Because when we think of power, we think primarily of *action*. That is because power is a commodity to be used and abused. But let me remind you of this part of God's character. He is not like us. Because he is uncreated and not made of parts, he *is* his attributes. So God does not possess power, as if he is supercharged by something outside of himself, rather he *is* all power. There is nothing that can limit him—he is immeasurably infinite. But God's power is displayed in ways we usually don't think of. Consider Jesus, on the night before his death. Peter is outraged that Jesus is being arrested while innocent, and so he puts his power of the sword to use.

Then Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?"

What is Jesus saying? He is saying: "I am all powerful: but my power is my freedom. I don't have to express it outwardly for it to be true. I am not a bull in a china cabinet, ready to unleash my power at any moment. I am completely free, my actions are unhindered." This is good news for us, because of how God chooses to reveal his power.

How do we measure what is immeasurable? We are given here a few ways, actually. First, we measure it in the resurrection of Christ in **verse 20**. The free and unlimited power of God is most clearly shown in the victory over that one enemy which only one man was ever able to conquer: death. Amass all the power in the world into your fingertips, and death still comes. But not for God in Christ. And notice how the resurrection power of God is actually tied to other knowledge of God. Think back to the hope of our calling. Why is our calling hopeful? Because



Christ has defeated death. We hope in Him because our calling is secure by the power of his resurrection. Without the empower of the empty tomb, our hope *would* be in vain. We would hope for something that would be interrupted by death. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:

If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied... I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

The resurrection is the power of God on display for us, assuring that the hope we have is not put to shame, making sure that we clothe ourselves in Christ, who has proven to be imperishable, and we inherit a world that is likewise imperishable.

Next measure of power? The ascension of Christ in **verse 20-21**. What is the ascension all about? Well first, it proves Jesus' victory now. Look, he is above every other name, not just in the future, but even now. The ascension proves that we are walking in victory when we walk with Jesus.

But the ascension is also the proof that Jesus did not rise from the grave just to go back down to it. It proves that his resurrection is final, and if his resurrection is final, ours is too. We have not been raised to new life only to die again, we've been raised to new life so that one day we too will ascend to meet God. Because Jesus ascended, you will never descend. Ascension means that in Christ, our only trajectory is only up, to the heavenly places where Christ is seated. It's his power in display at the ascension of Christ that allows us to be rich in him. Without the ascension, there is no glory: there is only this earth. But Jesus ascends to show us that a new world is coming, a better one, a glorious one, a world where he reigns above every other name, a world where we get a fuller picture of the beauty of God, and are made perfect in order to be filled up fully with that glory. Next time you are tempted to look downward instead of upward, remember the power of the resurrection and the ascension.

God Thought 4: Christ is Filling All in All, Through Us

At the end of the day though, it's hard to bridge that gap between what we think about God and how we act, isn't it? It's actually possible for God to be our intellectual project, as if we can domesticate him, keep him in the corner and bring him out for some logic chopping when we want to. The reality is that men and women have been trying this for millennia. Trying to domesticate God for our personal use is not new. Thinking high thoughts about God, without a change of heart, is sadly how many of God's enemies meet their end. Instead of a high king to bow to, they see God only as an idea.

Two helpful thoughts here that allow us to avoid this trap. First, despite our efforts, God cannot be domesticated. He will not be trifled with. He will not be contained or understood or kept on a shelf. How foolish of us to think we can craft him in our image, the creator of everything out of nothing! **Verse 22** tells us this. Through the incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ,



the plan of the Triune God from eternity past has come to its fruition. God has put all things under the feet of Christ. His kingdom has come. You can't hide from this. And for all of us who acknowledge Christ as Lord, what glorious news is this! There are no more enemies—death is defeated. Nothing hangs over God's head—he is the head of all—and when we are in him, nothing hangs over our head. No enemy can defeat us, no sin can ultimately take us down. We are secure, because Christ is head and **verse 23**, he is filling all in all. Meaning: every atom and molecule, every decision and determination, every throne room and oval office, every home and family, his glory is filling all of it, a day is coming when every knee will bow. This is the ultimate fulfillment of God's command to Adam which he could not fulfill, but which the new Adam can, when in the garden God told man: "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion [over it]." The whole cosmos is the dominion of Christ.

But that is not the best part. How do we avoid the trap of our God-thoughts turning away from worship and into idolatry? We recognize the good news of the gospel here. This prayer for knowledge is not just concerning God, although he is the actor and the centerpiece. We are in here too. Look back at **verse 19**. His power is pointed somewhere: his power is *towards us who believe*.

Before time began, God did not have less glory. Nor did he have less power. He did not need us to fulfill him. But when he decided to showcase his power and glory in the earth, when the Trinity in eternity spoke time and space into existence, God decided to create man. And man was made in his image. What does this mean? Many things, but it means at least this: we are created to showcase the glory of God. And so, in order to showcase his glory through us, he decided that his power and his love and his inheritance and his hope would not just be stored up, but given to the undeserving.

Look there at **verse 22**. Christ, the exalted one, is given to the church. God's great power is ultimately shown not in raising himself alone and exalting himself alone, but by raising and exalting his church. God is filling the whole world with the glory of the Son through his glorification of the church. Christ doesn't just fill all in all in himself. He does it through his body, through his people, through his church. Can you believe that? We are God's plan A. That in Christ we would be a unified, sanctified, made alive, gloriously bright beacon of his glory.

May God give us more knowledge of this. May our God-thoughts be full of this glorious grace. Because for us to be included in all this "all in all" domination, kingdom, rule, power, hope, resurrection, inheritance stuff? That's grace, top to bottom.

