

The Supremacy of God in the Use of Your Mind

by John Piper

This sermon emphasizes the importance of the life of the mind, focusing on the narrow and broad meanings of the term. It delves into the significance of the supremacy of God in the life of the mind, highlighting the need for a conscious, worshipful experience of God's supremacy and intentional display of this in mental work. The sermon also discusses the biblical urgency for Christians to care about cultivating the life of the mind, drawing from verses that emphasize the balance between knowledge and love. It concludes with a call to embrace the supremacy of God in all aspects of education and mental work.

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Description

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Transcript

We'll start with what do I mean by the life of the mind. I have a narrow meaning in mind, and I have a broad meaning in mind when I say the life of the mind. The narrow meaning is this, the life of a vocational scholar that is a life devoted to research, thinking, teaching, and writing.

That would be one way to talk about the life of the mind. But the broader meaning that I also have in mind is the use of the mind in everybody's life to observe, analyze, systematize, imagine, memorize, and express itself. So in the first sense, you have a small band of scholars who devote themselves to reading, thinking, observing, analyzing, expressing, teaching, writing, and then you have everybody else in the world who either use their mind well or poorly.

And my understanding of education, whether at the lower or higher levels, is that the people in the first group help the people in the second group use their minds better. Now what about the phrase, supremacy of God, still with definitions here? So what do I mean by the supremacy of God in the phrase, supremacy of God in the life of the mind? I think in a day of Islamic resurgence, we must not assume anything when

we use the word God today. So here's what I mean.

I mean the sovereign Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who was sent by Him to die for sinners, who was raised by Him from the dead, and that Christ reigns today over the universe as very God and very man. And so when I say God in this talk, I mean the Father of Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ is very God and very man, so you may substitute Jesus anytime you hear the word God as well. What do I mean by supremacy of God? Now this is probably the most important definition I'm going to give you because it gets at the heart of the matter.

By the supremacy of God in the life of the mind, I mean the conscious, worshipful experience of God's supremacy in the use of one's mind, together with an intentional display of this supremacy in our mental work. I'll say that again because if you understood it and embraced it and lived it, I could stop talking and we'd all go have cookies and wouldn't have to spend the rest of the time trying to persuade you or inspire you to it. What I mean by the supremacy of God in the life of this institution and its scholars and its administration and, God willing, its students is the conscious and worshipful experience of God's supremacy in the use of one's mind, together with an intentional display of this supremacy in our mental work.

I say it like that because atheists experience the supremacy of God. God holds them in being. They discover all their natural truths through God's common grace.

Atheists have massive experience of the supremacy of God, but they have no conscious, worshipful experience of that supremacy, and they make no efforts to intentionally display His supremacy in their mental work. And so you can see why I added all those qualifiers at the front of experiencing the supremacy of God. I mean the conscious, worshipful experience of God's supremacy and an unashamed display of His supreme truth and beauty in our mental work.

Now, when I take all those definitions and bring them together, they produce a prayer for Northwestern College in me, which goes like this, I pray that the vocational scholars, the faculty, will so consciously and worshipfully experience God's supremacy in the use of their minds and so intentionally display God's supremacy in their research and thinking and teaching and writing that the rest of us will be inspired and instructed to depend upon God's supremacy and display His supremacy in all of our mental work, indeed all of our work absolutely. So I pray that all that defined supremacy in the life of the mind will land upon this faculty and this administration and produce a profound effect upon the students and the community in which this school lives. Now, first question, why should a Bible-believing Christian care about the life of the mind? This is a very urgent biblical question, because the Bible says, knowledge puffs up, love builds up, 1 Corinthians 8.1. The Bible says, of the making of many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh, Ecclesiastes 12.12. The Bible says, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, says the Lord, 1 Corinthians 1.19. God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, 1 Corinthians 1.27. So the question is not just of academic interest, it is of biblical urgency.

Why should anybody care about cultivating this dangerous thing called the life of the mind, which is so fraught with danger and difficulty? Well, I really believe those warning sentences ought to fly like a banner over this school, but they should not be at the top of the mast. There's another flag that should be flying at the top of the mast, and it's a flag, in fact, there are flags all over the Bible that say, in spite of all those dangers, go for it. I'll give you a few.

Brethren, do not be children in your thinking, yet in evil be infants, but in your thinking be mature, 1 Corinthians 14.20. Doesn't exactly sound like Paul wants them to stop thinking, does it? 1 Timothy 2.7, think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything. 1 Peter 1.13, gird up the loins of your minds. It's an old image for pulling up the skirts so they don't mess you up if you try to run.

Sit yourself for action, move with an energetic mental activity as you embrace the hope set before you. Fourteen times the Apostle Paul rebukes the churches by saying, do you not know? Do you not know that your bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit? Do you not know that the law is binding on a person only as long as he lives? He gets very upset with these churches when they don't know certain things. Fourteen times in his letters he rebukes the church with that language.

And in the book of Acts, one, two, three, four, five, I wrote down six places where you find Paul, quote, reasoning in the synagogues with the Jews, proving that Jesus is the Christ. Now that's the banner I want you to put above the banner, knowledge puffs up. The dangers are huge to be here in this institution, teaching and studying and leading, but evidently from these other flags that are flying in the Bible, it's worth the risk.

In fact, we are commanded to pursue it, and we dare not run from it. Think with maturity, think with energy, think because you're commanded to, think for the sake of holiness, think for the sake of Christ. That's the way I would summarize those flags that I just read.

And of course, you would all add this, wouldn't you? The first and great commandment is this, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind. So the first commandment includes the mind, as God calls us to love Him. So there's no escaping the life of the mind.

We have a great mandate to pursue it. God cares about it. It's no fluke that everywhere the mission of Christianity has spread in the world, three institutions have come in the wake of that spread, church, school, hospitals.

That's not an accident. And the reason, I believe, is this, you can't worship in the church if you're dead, and you can't worship in the church if you don't know how to think. If you think wrongly about God, if you use your mind wrongly about the Bible and about the gospel and about God, you won't worship God in a Christ-exalting, God-honoring way.

So it's not surprising that everywhere the church goes or everywhere the mission goes, churches come, hospitals come, and schools come. Now, the supremacy of God is essential to the right use of the mind. That's what I'm arguing.

So if the right use of the mind is essential for worship and church, supremacy of God in the life of the mind is essential for the right use of the mind. But I haven't proved that yet, and that's where I want to go now. So how shall we establish that? How can I create a sense in this room or to whoever listens to this tape that your heart should burn with passion to see to it that you exercise your mind, whether vocationally as a scholar or avocationally in whatever you do, so that in and through all of that, God's supremacy is experienced worshipfully and displayed intentionally? How can I get you to embrace that? So the approach I'm going to take is this.

I simply look at my own experience and see what had the biggest impact on me, and I'm just going to run the risk that since it's biblical, it also might have a similar impact on you. The way I was gripped by the

supremacy of God in the life of the mind, as in all other things, is by being brought face-to-face with the shocking truth that God is supreme in His own mind. And it was in seeing that all over the Bible that added a booster to a thought that was there but wasn't a passion.

It didn't — the thought that I should live for the supremacy of God or I should think for the supremacy of God, under the supremacy of God and through the supremacy of God and for the supremacy of God, that didn't become a universal passion until I saw the biblical shocker that God is supreme in the mind of God, and therefore God should be supreme in my mind. Now, there are a lot of Christian scholars I know who say they believe in the supremacy of God in all things and in the life of the mind, but you look in vain in their scholarship for any robust public evidence of it. Robust public evidence of the commitment to the supremacy of God in the life of the mind.

My conviction is such people are probably not enthralled by the biblical reality of the supremacy of God in the mind of God. And so I'm hopeful that if I could bring to bear on such minds the enthralling biblical vision of the supremacy of God in the mind of God, it might shake them out of the kind of neutrality in which they presently carry out their tasks. It's a strange phenomenon to me to watch the debates happen, like in books and culture and other places, between historians who do history one way and others who do it another way.

And I'm puzzled because it just seems to me that if you are enthralled, if you are absolutely caught up, as it were, into the seventh heaven of God's thralldom with his own glory, nothing can stay the same again. Nothing stayed the same for me again back in 1968, 69, 70, as I was being hit, just clobbered over and over again by the majesty of God in the mind of God. So I have this sense that there's something about this truth, something about the truth, not that you can find in the Bible sentences that say, make God supreme in your mind.

That's not the kicker. The kicker is look at all these texts that say God's passion for his glory is the supreme value of his own mind. It's that that just jarred me and jarred me and jarred me and changed everything, just turned the world upside down.

So I have this suspicion, this sense that when we see the truth of God's supremacy in his own mind, we will make him supreme in our mind because we realize by doing that we're linking our lives to the highest, holiest, happiest purpose of the universe, namely God's exaltation in God, God's thrill with being God, God's admiration of his own excellencies, God's cherishing his own glory above all other values. When that grips a person, their scholarship will take on a conscious, worshipful experience of God's supremacy and yield an intentional display of God's supremacy. So how shall we see this? Well, let's try this.

I've got about, I don't know, six or seven ways to see it in the Bible. Let's go first to salvation and ask this. If you do a survey of the great works of salvation and ask at every one of those key points of salvation, what's driving God? What's his passion? What's uppermost in his mind? What you're going to find is something very surprising, and the events of salvation I have in mind are predestination, creation, incarnation, propitiation, sanctification, and consummation.

Let me give you a verse for each one of those six saving activities. Predestination, Ephesians 1. He predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ according to the purpose of his will. Why? To the praise of the glory of his grace.

So there you have God stating that he predestines us to sonship so that we will praise the glory of his grace. So his glory is uppermost in his motives in predestining us. Take creation, Isaiah 43, 6. Bring my sons from afar, my daughters from the ends of the earth, everyone who is called by my name, whom I have created for my glory, whom I have formed and made.

You were made that you might make much of God. God designed it that way, and therefore God's being made much of is his chief design. He is supreme in his own mind.

Incarnation, Romans 15, 8 and 9. I say that Christ has become a servant to the circumcision, that is, he became a Jew, on behalf of the truth of God, to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs. So one of his reasons for coming was to prove that God is a truth-teller, and, verse 9, for the Gentiles to glorify God for his mercy. So there are two purposes for the incarnation in this verse.

One, to prove he keeps his promises, and second, so that the Gentiles outside the covenant people might join in making much of God for his mercy. So God says to his Son in heaven before the incarnation, Will you go down and accomplish for me my praise among the nations? Or propitiation. That's the great work of removing the wrath of God on the cross, Romans 3.25. God put Christ forward as a propitiation by his blood to be received by faith.

This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. The design of the atonement includes, it's big in many parts, but it includes right at the center and ground of it, I mean to vindicate my righteousness, my name, my glory as my son dies so that I can justify the ungodly and still be just, that is, one who upholds the value of my glory. Sanctification, Philippians 1.9, This I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ to the praise, to the glory and praise of God.

So here you have Paul saying, Father, come now, fill your people with fruits of righteousness through Jesus Christ so that glory and praise comes to you. Now the Father's going to hear that and either in mock humility say, Oh, I don't seek my own glory, or he's going to say, That's exactly the kind of prayer I'll answer, just like Moses argued my name, you argue my name. I will engage for the sake of a holiness that reflects my glory.

So clearly in designing prayer, God's purpose is that he be supreme in our lives, and therefore he's supreme in his own value scheme. Finally, consummation, 2 Thessalonians 1.9, These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power when he comes, this is Jesus now coming back, when he comes to be glorified in his saints on that day and to be marveled at among all who have believed. So here's the Son of God awaiting the appointed time of the Father, and when the time comes, he comes, and if you ask him, Why are you coming? He says, To be glorified in the saints and to be marveled at among all those who have believed in me.

So clearly his passion, his driving, animating principle is, I will be supreme, and that's what makes him tick. Now that's one way to see it in the Bible. I got about six others, but you can just take all of salvation, look at the high points, look at the motive statements or the purpose statements, and what you see is that from beginning to end, what God is doing in saving you is magnifying his glorious grace.

Therefore we must feel the force of the supremacy of God's value in the mind of God. I don't think until we feel that, until that lands on us like a majestic weight of glory, we will live for the supremacy of God in our

minds the way we should. So let me show it to you from one or two or three or four or five other places.

Just a verse each maybe. Another way to see this is that the goal of the wrath of God, the mercy of God, the power of God, in my last Sunday's text, standing in this pulpit two days ago, was this, Romans 9, 23, to make known the riches of his glory for the vessels of mercy which he prepared beforehand for glory. His purpose for his mercy, his purpose for his wrath, his purpose for his power is to make known the riches of his glory.

He wants to be known as glorious, so his glory is supreme in his motives. Third way to see it in the Bible, the aim of all human endeavor from the most seemingly insignificant is said to be for this end, 1 Corinthians 10, 31. So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

So he of God designing eating and designing drinking so that even the lowest, simplest, everyday mundane things would be part of his great enterprise to be glorified. So clearly it is a pervasive passion of God that he be made much of in the world. Fourth, sin is defined as failure to make much of God.

Romans 3, 23, for all have sinned and fall short, literally lack the glory of God. And that word lack, I think, is filled up from 1, 23, where it says, although they knew God, they exchanged the glory of God for images resembling mortal man's birds, animals, and reptiles. This exchange, the essence of sin is that we choose things, love things, like things, and do things that show we do not value God above those things.

And so, when God defines sin that way, he shows that his passion is to be valued above all things. Fifth, his design for the nations is that he be displayed in his glory. Oh, sing to the Lord a new song.

Sing to the Lord all the earth. Sing to the Lord and bless his name. Tell of his salvation.

Declare his glory among the nations. So, here you have the psalmist, under the inspiration of God, saying, come on, you nations. Come on.

I'm going to declare the glory of God among you. Bow and worship this God. And that's the design of God for the psalms to talk that way, and therefore his passion is to be known that way among the nations.

A sixth way to see it in the Bible is that the heart of the gospel is defined in terms of making much of his glory. Listen to this, 2 Corinthians 4.4, the God of this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers to keep them from seeing the gospel. Now, how shall he define it? Here's what he says.

The gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. What's the gospel? It is the declaration of the glory of Christ as the image of God. So, God designed a gospel, a good news, a saving message of salvation in which he says, I'm right at the center of it as my son's glory shines as my image.

That's clearly what I want it to be because I am supreme in my own affections. Finally, number seven, he says this is what the earth is going to be filled with someday. Habakkuk 2.14, the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

That's God's plan. He aims to be supreme and known as supreme in the world. So, I draw out of all that biblical information an absolutely shocking truth.

It doesn't shock me anymore, but it shocked me about 30 years ago because I hadn't heard anybody say it up until the time I was 25 years old. I hadn't heard anybody say, God is supreme in the mind of God. The highest value in the priority structure of the mind of God is God, not me.

Nobody said that to me for 25 years. And when it came home to me, it changed everything. And I think it will change the life of the scholar.

If a scholar is gripped, if he's gripped by what God is gripped by, namely the supremacy of God, because God is gripped by the supremacy of God, I think there will be a conscious, worshipful experience of God's supremacy and an intentional display of God's supremacy in his mental work. I mean, how can you look at all those verses I just spent 20 minutes on, where God does everything to display his worth and choose a strategy of life that conceals him? That would be very strange to me. So I want to do one last thing with you.

Ask practically what this might look like in four faculties of the mind, that is, four capacities of the mind. And the four that I have picked out, and if you say, why these? My answer is, they're sort of on my front burner. That's all.

There's nothing absolute about them. Observation, cogitation, imagination, memorization. Let's say just a word about each of those.

Those are acts of the mind—observing, thinking, imagining, and memorizing. Those are acts of the mind which ought to be done under the weight and for the sake of the supremacy of God. So let's talk about each one just briefly.

Observation. The mind is a perceiving organ. I know it uses the eye, but it perceives, it observes, uses the ear, uses the senses, but it's the mind that is observing.

Observing. How shall the supremacy of God be manifested, displayed, in the right use of the mind in observation? I saw this quote years back by Albert, I mean by Charles Meisner about Albert Einstein, and he said this, I do see the design of the universe as an essentially religious question. That is, one should have some kind of respect and awe for the whole business.

It's very magnificent and shouldn't be taken for granted. In fact, I believe that is why Einstein had so little use for organized religion. Although he strikes me as a very religious man, he must have looked at what the preachers said about God and felt that they were blaspheming.

He had seen so much more majesty than they had ever imagined, and they were just not talking about the real thing. My guess is that he simply felt that the religions he had run across did not have a proper respect for the author of the universe. I felt rebuked as a pastor when I read that years ago, and vowed if I could help it never ever to handle the Bible or God in a way that would make an astronomer say, I've seen way more than you've seen, Piper, of majesty.

I just thought I would do my best never ever to let that happen. And I don't think it's just preachers who fail to see, who look at the stars and don't see, who look at a molecule and don't see, who look at a poem and don't see, who look into the face of a baby and don't see. This institution exists to help students get eyes in their heads so that they see what nobody else can see.

Light travels at 5.87 trillion miles a year. The galaxy of which our solar system is a part is about 100,000 light years in diameter. That's about 587,000 trillion miles across the short way.

It's one of about a million such galaxies in the optical range of our most powerful telescopes. And in our galaxy, there are about 100 billion stars. The sun is a smaller, modest one, only 6,000 degrees centigrade

on its cooler outer surface.

It travels at about 155 miles per second, which means that it will complete one revolution around the galaxy in 200 million years. Now, God has given us eyes and telescopes and microscopes to see these things. Somebody asked me one time, how can you believe in, how can you, how can you believe, be a Christian and believe that you're the only rational human type creature in the universe of this size? And I said, that's not any problem at all.

Because the point of the size of the universe is to bear witness to this little creature about the magnitude of the maker, not the significance of the creature. And therefore, the fact that the Hubble telescope is enabling us to go on and on and on should simply cause us not to fall into the trap of Albert Einstein's condemnation that the preachers don't know what they're talking about, because he has seen far more majesty than we have, which is sadly true for many pastors and many scholars. You would think in some classrooms and some pulpits that observing reality was quite a blah, ordinary, no-thrill thing, when every little thing, like Chesterton's, he's got eyes, he said, the really amazing thing is not the shape of anybody's nose, but that you have a nose.

Isn't it strange? It's so odd, it ought to be flat, two holes or no holes. Why is it like this? Noses are strange. They should cause wonder, small wonder at least, at least interest, but we're blind.

We are just blind. We are... You know, one of the reasons we're blind... I'm going to start preaching if I'm not careful here. One of the reasons we're blind is because we're utterly wrapped up in ourselves, just so wrapped up in ourselves.

The great glorious thing in academia, as well as church life and family life, is to forget yourself and be caught up in the beauties that God has made and that God is. That's not in the manuscript here. So one of the faculties I'm pleading for the supremacy of God in is the faculty of observation.

You know what you should see when you look up into the starry sky at night? To whom then will you compare me that I should be like him, says the Holy One? Lift up your eyes on high and see who created these stars. He who brings out their host by number, calling them all by name. By the greatness of his might and because he is strong in power, not one of them is missing.

Oh, I hope that God would grant Northwestern College such a faculty that in every classroom, from economics to anthropology to music to physical education to math to Bible, just wherever it comes in the disciplines, that God would grant a faculty who sees wonder everywhere, especially right in front of them in their students or right in a book composed by a human mind in the image of God. Second, cogitation. I just chose that weird word cogitation to make it rhyme with all the others.

What I mean by that is the faculty of analyzing, synthesizing, systematizing what you do with what you observe, what the mind begins to do with it when it comes into the brain, thinking. We call it thinking. It's what a lot of scholars substitute footnotes for and substitute reading for.

Let's give a little plea here. I'm a slow reader. I taught college for six years.

I never assigned more than two books in a semester. Now, different disciplines, different problems, I suppose, but what we did with those books, you wouldn't believe. I'd assign Adler's How to Read a Book, and we'd rip that one to shreds for about five weeks, and then I'd assign Aims of Interpretation or something like that, and there would be dozens and dozens and dozens of study questions that made

them understand the word therefore eight-tenths of the way down, page 53, and how it relates to the paragraph before and the paragraph after, because you've got to get this man's argument and restate it to his satisfaction and then show why it's good or bad.

Most people substitute reading for thinking. Most people, many scholars, substitute footnoting for thinking. There's no correlation between having a PhD and being able to think.

There is no correlation between many footnotes and being a good, penetrating, synthesizing, truth-recognizing thinker. Thinking is just plain hard work, and footnotes generally get in the way. I believe you've got to credit your sources.

I just think we are all prone, me included, to make ourselves look well-read. Listen to what Paul says about thinking. Second Timothy 2-7, think over what I say.

Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything. Isn't that amazing? He did not say, the Lord will give you understanding in everything, so you don't need to think. And he didn't say, you must think, because the Lord certainly will not give you understanding.

You must get it. He said, the seemingly paradoxical, think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding. Oh, there's a worldview in there.

There's a theology in there. There's a whole way to approach reality in there, and it is this. God has appointed these little things called brains, fallible as they are, to be his means of transmitting understanding of reality into us.

Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding. Not go around your thinking, but through your thinking. So the implication with regard to the supremacy of God is that in the life of the mind and the use of the brain, we will really believe in prayer.

That is, we will make much of our absolute dependence on the second half of that verse. I am thinking. The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but victory belongs to the Lord.

So thinking is made ready. I'm going to open this book, I'm going to take some caffeine if I have to, I'm going to read slowly, I'm going to underline, I'm going to mark, I'm going to put question marks, I'm going to take notes, I'm going to understand the flow of this man's thought, and the Lord may give me understanding. So if I make any progress in understanding, I bow down and I honor the Lord.

God gives heat through burning wood, and strength through eating food, and sound through the blowing of a horn, and understanding through the work of thinking. And therefore, since clearly the Lord is the one that's giving understanding, as we think with our minds, hard, rigorous, robust thinking, we surely will bring our thinking into accord with what we know about His values and make Him supreme in what we do with those brains as we think. Like, we will dethrone irrational arguments against God's truth, 2 Corinthians 10.4. We will expose slippery, equivocal language and bring all things to light, 2 Corinthians 4.2. Oh, one of the great contributions of the Christian college in this day is teaching students to be ruthlessly analytic in the way they handle language in the media.

We all know spin doctrine, where did that phrase come from? It's a whole new, we got a whole new language to talk about what is done with language in our day. To conceal people craft sentences to be misunderstood, so that Saddam will understand it one way and the Russians will understand it another

way, or whatever. We work at being ambiguous.

We work at being slippery and equivocal. I tell you in the name of Jesus, fight that with all your might, because Paul said, we speak the truth before God in an unadulterated, upfront, straightforward, let-it-all-out way. And that's what we contribute to this corrupting language culture of ours.

And we labor to make difficult truths plain and clear. The best thinkers, like C.S. Lewis, for example, just an absolutely razor-sharp mind, is the most clear and easy to understand. If you read a muddle-headed academic article, you've got a mediocre thinker behind it.

The profound things in life cannot always be made acceptable, but they can be made intelligible so that an intention transmit from one head to another head with clarity. That can happen. And that should be our aim.

Third, imagination. So we've moved from observation through cogitation or thinking to imagination. I believe one of the great duties of the Christian mind is imagination.

We move now from observing what is there in reality, whatever your sphere is, could be any discipline in this school at all, observing what is there, to analyzing and ordering what is there, call that thinking, now to imagining what might be there but you can't see it there. And that's called, sometimes, scientific discovery, intuitive, imaginative, what could possibly be here that I'm not seeing that would account for what I am seeing, which is very strange. That happens in the Bible, that happens in the chemistry lab.

Imagination is a duty, I say. Why do I say it's a duty? Because you can't love people in obedience to the second commandment or the golden rule without it, can you? Whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them. So you have to imagine yourself into their situation.

This is where the word compassion and sympathy come from, those calm and sim, a Latin and a Greek prefix for I'm with you, I'm in it, I'm in there with you. That takes imagination to get inside a widow's skin or a mom who just lost a one-year-old or a woman who hasn't been with her son for five months and she thinks she's probably committed suicide somewhere and he'll never show up again and the things I pray with after church every Sunday, how can I love these people? There's only one way is if I could have some, just a little taste of imagination that can transport me out of myself into their situation and feel some of what they're feeling. We should work hard to cultivate that gift of imagination.

There's a second reason why I say imagination is a duty and it's this. This is closer to the life of the mind, perhaps proper. Speaking or writing or singing or drawing or painting or carving, thrilling truth in a boring way is sin.

Thinking and then expressing through writing or some artistic form, a glorious truth, a thrilling truth, a scintillating truth, a mind-blowing truth in a boring way is sin. It's wrong. It's wrong to preach boring sermons.

It's wrong to teach boring classes. It's just wrong. God is not boring, nor is his awesome creation, but it takes really hard work to find fresh imaginative language to state the old beauties because Dr. Kilby, one of my lit professors back at Wheaton used to say, one of the chief marks of the fall is that we get tired of everything.

Sunsets, you visit the Alps for the first time and you're breathless. By the afternoon, you're going to watch TV. One day and it's old hat.

Not so little children, Chesterton said. Little children keep saying, do it again, Daddy, do it again, Daddy, and sometimes you test them to see if they'll ever stop and they never stop. You always run out of juice before the child does.

And he says, that's because they have not quite been jaundiced yet. There's some little remnant about the original there, even though they're fallen. That's the way Adam and Eve would have been.

Sun came up. Eve, look, he did it again. Can you believe the sun came up? And there would be this incredible sense of wonder.

Now, I say, that's hard work to use your imagination that way. I say it as a preacher. We must think of patterns of words called a poem or called a metaphor or called an analogy.

We must think of them. That's what makes C.S. Lewis so rivetingly interesting is because every other sentence is an analogy, it seems like. And I'm listening to him on tape right now in the bathroom.

I'm listening to Mere Christianity, which I haven't read for 30 years, and I'm just blown away by this man's ability to think up a, it's like this, it's like this, it's like this, it's like this, and I'm saying, that's hard work. I sit there on Saturday afternoons knowing my exegesis of my Romans passage and knowing if I just say that, what I say with my old, tried, biblical, worn-out theological language with no analogies, no metaphors, no windows, it will bore people. Not because it is boring, but because I'm failing.

I have not risen to the use of my mind under the supremacy of God in the capacity of imagination. One of the reasons I think imagination is such hard work is because it's the most God-like of all the faculties of the mind. It's the closest we get to creation ex nihilo, creation out of nothing.

I mean, picture the difficulty. Have you ever tried to write a poem? You got a wife, I have a wife, I write a poem for my wife on Valentine's, birthday, Mother's Day, I think that's about it, three times a year at least, I write a poem for her. And sometimes I am absolutely dog-tired, it's nine o'clock at night, I've got to get up at six in the morning, I forgot until now to plan to do this, I'm not going to break this pattern, and you sit there and you say, out of nothing must emerge a poem.

I have no idea what the theme should be, I have no idea what the words are going to be, it is non-existent in the universe, and I must bring it into being. That's an awesome task, that's what imagination is. And I think one of the reasons there's so many boring preachers is because there's so many lazy preachers.

It's just easy to say the language that comes naturally. Well, the language that comes naturally is in a rut, it's just the same old, same old, same old that you've said every week, and until you give an hour to looking for three analogies with a hard, mind-bending, however-it-happens creation, almost ex nihilo, you're probably going to be boring. And I think this institution exists with all Christian institutions to prove to students and to help cultivate in students this truth.

The faculty of imagination is the faculty given by God to man so that God's beauty will be made beautiful. It's the faculty given to man so that God's beauty will be shown to be beautiful. Finally, and I'm almost done, memorization.

I debated whether to talk about this one or not because it's not going to sound real scholarly, and I'm supposed to sound scholarly here, but I decided to do it anyway because I don't care anymore about what people think about me. Because I really, I would not have said this, maybe even ten years ago, I wouldn't have closed the talk like on this about memory and memorization. So I want to ask this question.

Why should a Christian college concern itself with cultivating a habit of memorization in its community of learners? Why should a Christian college cultivate a habit of memorization? I haven't yet said memorization of Scripture. I will say that eventually, but I don't limit it to that. A habit of memorization.

Now the sad thing is that in academia we do cultivate one, and you know what we cultivate? Answers to test questions. What a sad debauching of the gift of memory. I teach students to memorize the table of elements or the answers to these historical dates or, but where has this faculty said, our students are going to memorize these great poems, these great speeches, these great chapters in the Bible? Where is anybody cultivating a community like that? Let me give you a couple of reasons why I think this is so crucial to cultivate a community of memorization.

The best and wisest things that will ever be written have already been written. The best and wisest are in the Bible. There are some great poems and great songs outside the Bible.

God has been seen and savored and celebrated with words and music before you were born in ways far more magnificent than you will ever see or savor or celebrate him in this life. Why not, why not take your little plug and put it into that socket through memory, through memorization of some magnificent song or poem, chapter in the Bible? Why does it make such a difference? Here I might be over my head. I'll bet some of you are way ahead of me on this one because I'm not sure.

I'm just going to speculate for a minute here. Why is memorizing beautiful and true things so deeply influential on the fruit and spirit of the mind? I think it's because when you put them into your mind by way of memory, they go down deeper and they shape more than if you just read them. The mind and the brain are a great mystery, aren't they? I just find them amazingly mysterious.

Who but God can explain what a thought is? Why does one thought occur to you and not another? How do words flow from our mouths without each one pausing to check it out with deliberation? I mean, a lot of people say, think before you speak. Well, nobody can do that. Not with every word.

Like if I say, not with every word, I say, not, do I want to say with? Yeah, with. The, do I want to say the? Yeah, say the. Do I want to say word? Yeah, say word.

I can't do that. I can't check every word. Well, how do they work then? How do they know when to line up? I'm not, they're not checking with me.

I mean, I just find the brain absolutely mind-boggling, which might help me understand why memorizing great literature or profound theological truth from God has such deep subconscious effects. Because I can't figure out how the brain works. I don't know where my thoughts come from or why words line up the way they do.

So might it not be the case that when you stock 1 Corinthians 13, Romans 8, a dozen Psalms, Isaiah 23, when you stock these in there and you say them year after year after year, they have a deep root effect on the way your mind looks at reality and feels about reality and speaks reality. Who knows? But that is the explanation. But it is so.

So my first argument for why memorization is so crucial is that it has this profound shaping effect upon our thinking. And a second reason is that God intends the mouth to be a fountain of life. Proverbs 10, 11, the mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life.

I would just ask you, is your mouth a fountain of life to people? One of the effects of Christian education should be students come in and their mouths are often disappointing, maybe full of criticism, full of cynicism, full of banality, talking about the latest soap or something, you know, just what a use for this God-given instrument. By the time they leave, the reputation of this school should be, you get around those students and life happens through their mouths. Life happens.

How does that happen? How does your mouth become a fountain of life? I think the answer is when this mind and this heart are stocked full of glorious things, glorious truths and beautiful language, this instrument has some resources to draw upon both consciously and unconsciously. And out they come in prayer, and out they come in counsel, and out they come in crisis. Well, very practically, as I close, I would say I have no idea whether a school will ever pick up such a thing.

I think if I were responsible here at this school, I would try to bring about some kind of agreement on the faculty and the administration that we will require henceforth from all students over four years that they memorize 12 Psalms, Isaiah 53, the whole Sermon on the Mount, Romans 8, and 1 Corinthians 13. You spread that out over four years, it's like a verse a week probably, you know, it's just very little, very little. I just wonder what the effect would be.

The main good effect might be simply forcing students to try once what they might not have tried and now will do for the rest of their lives because of the profound effect it had on them. So I close now with an exhortation to you all in your kind patience to me for this time. I say this to the faculty and to the administration primarily.

May you be unafraid at this school. May you be so poised in God, so unworried about the criticisms of the world, so yourself in Christ. May you be so unafraid that you can draft philosophies of education, statements of purpose, class syllabi, lectures and assignments which are manifestly Christ-exalting, God-centered, Bible-saturated, and may you enjoy in every discipline the conscious, worshipful experience of the supremacy of God in the use of your minds, namely the truth and beauty of Christ, by whom and for whom all things are made.

Let's pray. Father in heaven, we long that you be experientially, worshipfully, consciously experienced as supreme in our lives and in this school. And I pray for myself and for all the students here, faculty here, board members, guests here, I pray that they would unashamedly find creative, robust, powerful, compelling ways to display their allegiance to the supremacy of God in their minds and over their discipline.

Lord, do these great works. Preserve this school for another 100 years if Jesus does not come back first, I pray. May someone be standing here or wherever the campus is located in 100 years, celebrating as we are this year, 100 amazing years of faithfulness.

I ask this in Jesus' name, amen.

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