

## BOOK REVIEW

by Beryl Clemens Smith

### **Think – The Life of the Mind and the Love of God**

by John Piper

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Living in a world of sound-bites, spin and hype, where most folks spend more free time watching TV, their computer screen, texting, or enjoying some form of evangelical entertainment, who has time to read a book, let alone really think about theology (the study of God)? It was refreshing to read John Piper's new book *Think*. His premise is succinct: It "is about using the means God has given us to know him, love him, and serve people." In *Finally Alive*, Piper emphasized the new birth as our basis of loving others with the love of God. In *Think*, his plea is "to embrace serious thinking as a means of knowing and loving God and people." I can think of no true believer who would not greatly benefit from his challenge.

Piper adequately challenges the philosophy of relativism. It is immoral, duplicitous, perverse, and corrupts "the high calling of language." It enslaves people, and like a poisonous gas – invisible – it pollutes all of society. It is "a prostitution of the gift of thinking."

Piper skillfully attacks the anti-intellectualism, calling it a "destructive use of the mind – like pragmatism and subjectivism." "The remedy for barren intellectualism is not anti-intellectualism, but humble, faithful, prayerful, Spirit-dependent, rigorous thinking." Reading the Scriptures "is the God-appointed way of knowing the mysteries of God." He emphasizes the need to make thinking an intentional endeavor – hard work – with the benefits of deferred gratification. The joy of learning the meaning of Scripture is enduring the pain of hard study. And aiding that study is developing the habit of asking questions with a humble spirit. "God gives the treasures of His wisdom through the tenacious task of our thinking."

It was thrilling to read of Piper's passion for Biblical thinking, but also somewhat disheartening to take note of things I missed.

First, I missed a greater emphasis on the Person and work of the Holy Spirit. Although there are hundreds of references to "thinking," I only noted about thirty references to the Holy Spirit. Because of unscriptural excesses of some of our Pentecostal brethren, we have a tendency to push the teaching of the Scripture on the person and work of the Holy Spirit to the periphery of our discourse, thus failing to acknowledge, as Warfield did, that the Holy Spirit was "sent forth to act as His [Christ's] representative in His absence." In other words, should we at least be as familiar with the Holy Spirit who indwells us as our guide as the disciples were with Jesus? Even though it's the Spirit's work to reveal Christ – not

Himself – does not the Holy Spirit feel grieved by our continual avoidance of His person as God’s executor and dispenser of divine activities on earth? Whereas Piper’s plea is that we might “embrace serious thinking as a means of knowing and loving God and others,” we might rather heed Christ’s admonition, “If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him” (Luke 11:13)?

Second, I missed a more thorough connection of the Spirit’s work of regeneration and our thinking. Whereas some would say there can be nothing in the heart that is not first in the mind, others would hold that the regeneration of man’s spirit (heart) by the Holy Spirit is that giving of spiritual life that enables our minds to properly and spiritually know God. “It is the Spirit who gives life, the flesh profits nothing” (John. 6:63). “For the Spirit searches all things, yea, the deep things of God” (I Corinthians 2:11). “As the spirit of man is the seat of human life, the very life of man itself, so the Spirit of God is His very life-element” (Warfield, *Biblical And Theological Studies*, p. 53). Is this what Jesus meant when He said, “That having been born of the Spirit is spirit” (John 3:6)? Whereas Piper states that human thinking and divine revealing work together in awakening saving faith,” does the Spirit awaken faith that is a part of us, or is faith something that is “not out of us” (Eph. 2:8), but a gift of the Spirit, and the functioning of our quickened spirit that has been “renewed” by regeneration (Titus 3:6)?

I failed to find reference to Paul’s teaching on the “mystery, which has been hidden from ages and generations...which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.” Because of what some scholars call distortions in the teachings of those who believe in a “deeper life,” I feel we must ask ourselves, “How are we united with Christ?” Do we share Paul’s heartthrob to “know Him” and “be discovered” as living in vital, spiritual union with Him? Have we plumbed the depths of Christ’s words, “I in them, and Thou in Me....”? I failed to find reference to Paul’s words, “we have the mind of Christ” (I Cor. 2:16). Can we say with Paul, “Christ lives in me.”?

Warfield explained it this way: “There is a sense, then, in which, when Christ goes away, the Spirit comes in His stead; there is also a sense in which, when the Spirit comes, Christ comes in Him; and with Christ’s coming the Father comes too” (Ibid., p. 40). Can we really express the love of God to others without the Spirit’s living the very life of Christ through our mortal flesh (2 Cor. 4:10)?

In the latter portion of the book, Piper lucidly promotes the values of education available at Bethlehem College and Seminary. As “soon as feasible, we will offer an accredited Bachelor of Arts and Master of Divinity.” With a curriculum that is church-based and stressing the thinking values of “observing, understanding, evaluating, feeling, applying, and expressing,” Piper assures that future graduates will be capable thinkers, lovers of God, well-equipped ambassadors of Christ, and servants of others.

Christians, above all people on earth, should be supreme thinkers. In Christ, both the written and indwelling Word, the believer finds completeness. As J.I. Packer said in *Hot Tub Religion*, “The secret joy for believers lies in the fine art of Christian thinking. It is by this means that the Holy Spirit, over and above His special occasional visitations in moments of joy, regularly sustains in us the joy that marks us out as Christ’s” (p. 159). If you’re up to some serious thinking that will help you know God, love Him, and truly love others, then John Piper’s challenge to *Think* will get your “little gray cells” humming.

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