

The Practicality of Redemption (11)

Thinking Correctly

Introduction

A. The Bible often reminds us of the importance of thinking correctly. When we find ourselves in some kind of inner turmoil, being troubled, or giving way to sin (grudges, judging, unrighteous anger, pride, bitterness, lust, irrational fear, accepting error, negativism, etc.) the source of the immediate problem is almost always a failure to think correctly. Proverbs 4:23; 25:28; Romans 8:5-9; Colossians 3:1-3

B. Our thought life has a direct bearing on all our other functions. What we think on causes a response of our will (choices), our body (desires) and our emotions (feelings). Our thinking will also begin a process that will lead to other thoughts and thought patterns. To obey God we must begin within -- with our hearts and mind.

I. A Biblical Distinction: we are not our thoughts!

A. God created us as a person, a spiritual person, and gave us at least four functions. We must distinguish between our person and our functions.

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	. W .	Mind -- Thoughts
	. I .	
PERSON	. L .	Emotions -- Feelings
	. L .	
	.	. Body - Desires

B. Because of the Fall and our sin we have lost control of our functions. Now our functions often control us -- as in the alcoholic.

C. Most if not all of us have two levels of thinking. The second level is quite subtle and almost always negative and condemning. It is extremely important to recognize this activity and take charge of it. See the work of David Burns in Feeling Good and Aaron Beck in Cognitive Therapy.

II. A Biblical Explanation: We may not originate all our thoughts.

A. Our thinking may be caused by our "old nature."

For from within ... proceed evil thoughts ... and these defile ... Mark 7:21

B. Our thinking may be caused by the "world."

For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father ... I John 2:16

C. Our thinking may be caused by "Satan or wicked spirits."

1. Satan could talk to Eve before she became a sinner!

Yea, hath God said, ye shall not eat of every tree ... Genesis 3:1-5

mercy toward us -- has warned us regarding some critical areas of life.

- B. Among warnings regarding idolatry (Exodus 20:1-3), hypocrisy (Isaiah 29:13), self-righteousness (Jeremiah 7:1-16), disobedience (Matthew 7:21-23), wrong priorities (Matthew 23:23), and covetousness (Ephesians 5:5), we are carefully admonished and counseled regarding faith.
- C. These warnings are not to be taken lightly. We are being shown in these, not only some of the critical foundation stones of the Christian life -- but also areas where we are prone to fail. As the wise and kind Father that He is -- the Lord has sought to protect us. We must listen to Him.

I. The Twofold Context Regarding this Warning.

A. The place of trials in the life of the believer. James 1:2-4

1. God's purpose in permitting trials -- is to lead us to maturity.
2. When we respond to God by faith in the trials, and submit to what He has in mind to teach us (patience) the result is twofold: we will be perfect (maturity) and entire (complete).
3. Because of the value of such maturity -- we are exhorted to accept our trials with joy. V2

B. The Promise to be claimed in our trials. James 1:5

1. The wisdom promised is to enable us to understand our trials, how to respond to God in them, and how to grow through them.
2. We need this wisdom because of our natural tendency to refuse the trial and to fall into unbelief, complaining, coveting, and self-pity.
3. We must beware of interpreting our trials incorrectly.

II. The Instruction Regarding our Trials -- Respond by Faith. James 1:6A

- A. Faith is a divine gift -- given in salvation -- possessed by all believers.
- B. Faith is like a function, an ability, a gift that must be used in order to produce benefits.
- C. True faith is rooted in the faithfulness of God and is characterized by trust, a willingness to wait, and a surrender to God and His Will.
- D. The one indispensable key to spiritual growth, to fruitfulness, to joy, to stability and every other virtue -- is our faith.

III. The Warning Regarding Defective Faith.

A. The explanation regarding defective faith. James 1:6B

1. To "waver" in our request for wisdom -- is to mix the supplication with doubt.
2. We waver and doubt when we're not really sure we want what we ask.
3. We waver and doubt when we're not fully surrendered to His Will.
4. We waver and doubt when we have areas in life we do not wish to deal with -- and we're not sure He will leave them alone. Too often we want God's blessing but we don't want to face our grudges, our bitterness, our sins of omission and commission, our anger, our hypocrisy, our unfulfilled promises and vows, or our responsibilities.

B. The illustration of defective faith. James 1:6C

1. When we say to God, "I want Your wisdom and Your will -- but please do not ... " -- our life is like a surging and wind-swept ocean.
2. As water has no inner stability to resist pressure -- the doubter is one who is pushed one way and then another by his own desires and by the circumstances and temptations of life.

C. The instructions regarding defective faith. James 1:7

1. Now we have a promise of unanswered prayer. When we doubt and thus say to God -- "I want wisdom about this, but not that, and I want Your help with this, but not with that" -- then we are acting out our sinfulness, playing at being God, and make it impossible for God to bless us.
2. How ironic is the life of the doubter. He asks of God -- but does not want what he asks -- and that is what he gets -- nothing.

D. The conclusion regarding defective faith. James 1:8

1. A defective faith is rooted in a defective character.
2. The double-minded person is one who has not made up his mind. He is constantly wavering between two positions.
3. Biblically a double-minded person is one who has not surrendered himself unreservedly to God and to the will of God. He tries to give himself to God one day and the next day lives as though he belongs to himself.
4. The double-minded person is "A walking civil war in whom trust and distrust of God wage a continual battle against each other." William Barclay, The Letters of James and Peter
5. The character of a double-minded person permeates into all he thinks and does-- it produces instability everywhere. Nothing is ever really settled, priorities and goals are always changing, and firm convictions cannot be found.

2. Satan could talk to the Lord Jesus.

And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God command that these stones be made bread. Matthew 4:3

Comment: We must learn about the source of our thoughts. Are you originating your thoughts or are some of them coming from some other source?

III. A Biblical Clarification: Our thoughts are not authoritative!

- A. Simply having a thought does not mean it indicates who or what we are. To accept our thoughts as authoritative opens one up to profound error.
- B. The presence of a thought in our mind does not mean we must obey it.
- C. The presence of a thought does not mean it has or will come to pass. We do not create reality by our thought life.
- D. The presence of a wrong thought, as in temptation, does not make us sinful or guilty.

IV. A Biblical Warning: We must reject wrong thoughts .

- A. When a thought is not in harmony with the Bible or truth, and is not what we desire or believe -- then we have not originated that thought -- it has come from some other place.
 - 1. If we accept a wrong thought -- error -- then we give that thought some control over us. Error is powerful. Satan the Deceiver, Accuser, and the Father of Lies is always looking for those who will believe his lies.
 - 2. Learn to reject wrong thoughts.

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, I take charge of my thinking and reject that thought of _____. I bring all my thinking into subjection to the Lord Jesus and choose to believe the truth as found in the Bible.

- B. We must learn to monitor our thought life. Ask yourself as to the effect the thought has on you. Does it edify or upset you. Does it make it easier to pray or harder? If the effect is disturbing then error may be present. We must be willing to ask God for help and examine our thought life.

V. A Biblical Exhortation: Think on correct thoughts!

Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true ... honest ... pure ... lovely ... of good report ... think on these things. Philippians 4:8

- A. We must cooperate with the Holy Spirit and use the Bible as a sword so we can distinguish between truth and error. Ephesians 6:17
- B. Make a list of negative thinking and dare correct it from the Bible.
- C. Suggestion: Stop being afraid of your thought life -- the whole process is simply one of your functions and you can take charge of it. Make some choices as to what you think on. Memorize Scripture and meditate on the verses. Sing hymns and think on the words. Learn to reject all negative and erroneous thinking. Choose to think on truth -- trusting God.

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