

The psalmist asked the Lord to search him and know his thoughts (Psalm 139:23). What a bold prayer! Obviously, the psalmist believed his thought life was important to the Lord. He was right. Thoughts matter, and the Lord wants our thoughts as well as our actions to honor Him.

In the days that preceded the Flood, the Lord observed the wickedness of a corrupt civilization. He was keenly aware that every intention of the thoughts of man's heart was constantly evil (Genesis 6:5). This declaration that man's thoughts were evil should abolish the notion that it doesn't matter what we think as long as we do not put a wrong thought into action. Evil thoughts are sinful whether or not they lead to sinful deeds. Thoughts are the building blocks of a life that is either righteous or unrighteous. It is important, therefore, to replace wrong thinking with right thinking.

WRONG THINKING

Wrong thinking takes various forms, from impure day-dreaming to constructing sinful plans. Here are four kinds of thoughts believers should avoid.

1. Perilous thoughts. One such perilous thought is thinking God doesn't exist. Psalm 10 identifies wicked men who think God doesn't exist (v. 4). By ruling out the possibility that God exists, they spew out lies and threats and engage in violence (vv. 7, 8). Psalm 14:1 describes the atheist as a fool.

Of course, believers acknowledge God as alive and personal, but occasionally a believer may think and act contrary to what he believes. He may entertain thoughts that ignore God's existence. Such wrong thinking leads to sinful behavior and God's disciplinary action.

2. Perverse thoughts. Lewd images and immoral behavior attack our senses through the media, but we must not allow them to occupy our thought life. Jesus said whoever looks at a woman with lustful intent is guilty of adultery (Matthew 5:28). He taught that evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, and slander come from a person's inner being (15:19). No one commits adultery without first thinking about it. No one robs a bank without first planning it in his mind. No one murders another person without first conceiving murder in his mind.

“Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts” (Psalm 139:23).

3. Presumptuous thoughts. Unfortunately, after a person is saved by grace, he may engage in presumptuous thinking. He may assume that he can direct his own steps, handle temptation easily, and face every trial in his own strength. First Corinthians 10:12 issues the warning, “Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.”

Samson exhibited presumptuous thinking when he arose from Delilah’s lap with a haircut and encountered a contingent of Philistine soldiers ready to capture him. However, Samson was unprepared for a fight. He boasted, “I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself (Judges 16:20). But the verse ends on a sad note. “And he wist [knew] not that the LORD was departed from him.” Samson failed to understand that past victories do not guarantee present victory. Someone wisely observed that what happened in the past should be guideposts, not hitching posts.

The Laodicean church also entertained presumptuous thoughts, presuming it needed nothing. However, Jesus described the church as “wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked” (Revelation 3:17). He summoned the church to repent (“undergo a change of mind”).

4. Proud thoughts. Lucifer epitomizes proud thinking. He was so proud that he thought he could dethrone God and take His place on the throne (Isaiah 14:13, 14). He was wrong, of course, but individuals exist today who proudly assume they can order their lives better than God can. Romans 12:3 exhorts, “For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think.” Galatians 6:3 identifies proud thinking as self-deceptive. Instead of allowing pride to reside in our thoughts, we ought to submit our minds and our bodies to the Lord (Romans 12:1, 2).

The apostle James endeavored to snuff out proud thinking by appealing to believers to live not according to self-will, but according to God’s will (James 4:13–15). Proverbs 3:5 and 6 admonish us believers to acknowledge God in everything and to

trust Him to direct our paths. Only inflated pride would make a person think he is capable of navigating life without God's input.

RIGHT THINKING

Scripture identifies the kind of thinking that honors God. It is, first of all, *Christlike thinking*. In Philippians 2:5–8 the apostle Paul exhorts us to let the mind of Christ be in us. Like Jesus, we should think humbly and obey God all the days of our lives. This kind of thinking causes us to pray, “thy will be done” (Matthew 26:42).

Second, we need to practice *focused thinking*. Instead of focusing our thoughts on negative issues, we should focus on things that edify us. When I was a substitute teacher in Altoona, Pennsylvania, I was impressed with a large sign above the platform of a middle school auditorium. The sign spelled out the words of Philippians 4:8, “Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.” I suppose that middle school sign is no longer displayed, but the words of Philippians 4:8 should be written on every Christian's heart. Its message is as essential to right thinking as wholesome food is to good health.

When a person becomes a Christian, God cleanses him from sin and gives him the Holy Spirit. The Spirit gradually conforms him to the image of Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18). He performs what may be called a catharsis: He uses the Word of God to transform our minds, hearts, ambitions, and character into minds, hearts, ambitions, and character that honor the Lord. Our responsibility is to cooperate with the Holy Spirit by yielding to His control. The more we meditate on the Holy Spirit-inspired Scriptures and obey them, the more our thinking will be pure. The psalmist declares in Psalm 119:11, “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.” ■

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