

Lord of Our Thoughts



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Rom. 12:1, 2; 1 Cor. 2:16; 2 Cor. 10:3-5; Eph. 6:10-18; Col. 3:1, 2.*

Memory Text: “If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth” (*Colossians 3:1, 2, NKJV*).

Key Thought: The Lord Jesus Christ desires to renew our minds and be Lord of our thoughts. It is God's intention that every thought be brought into captivity to the will of Christ.

The battle of the mind. Many new Christians have the mistaken idea that once they have received Jesus as Lord and Savior the battle is over. In reality, the battle has only just begun. As seen in the earthly life of Jesus, it's often after our baptism that Satan intensifies his attacks. The battle is fought in our minds, and one of Satan's primary temptations is the sin of remembrance: He tries to lure us back to the old, forbidden pathways. Our Lord Jesus Christ, in contrast, wants us to forget what is behind and “be transformed by the renewing of [our minds]” (*Rom. 12:2, NKJV*). The Greek verb translated “transformed” comes from the same verb used in Mark 9:2, when Jesus was “transfigured.” What a remarkable ideal the Lord Jesus Christ has for each of His redeemed children. He desires to so renew our minds that the glory of the Lord will shine through us.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 16.*

The Power of Thought

Read the following texts: Exodus 20:17, Matthew 5:8, 1 Corinthians 2:16, 1 Chronicles 28:9. What's the one thing they all have in common?

The Bible, of course, has so much to say about our deeds and our words, all of which is understandable, because our deeds and words can have powerful effects on ourselves and others.

Yet, the Bible also makes it clear that the Lord cares about our thoughts. But why? As long as we don't act on our thoughts, what does it matter? Why should God care what we think? Whoever heard of anyone hurting another person with a thought? Thoughts are private, personal things that, in the end, if we don't express them or act upon them, don't hurt anyone.

Right?

Why do you think it matters what we think, as long as we don't act on our thoughts? Or is it possible to not, eventually, act on our thoughts? Or even if we don't act on our thoughts, why does it matter what we think? See Gen. 6:5, Prov. 4:23, Matt. 5:27-30.

Because our thoughts are the foundation of all our words and actions, it matters what we think. Every evil deed ever committed, every evil word, every sin, began first as a thought. How many millions of people first harbored thoughts—nothing more than “harmless” thoughts—that eventually sprouted into words or deeds that have caused incredible damage? Who can know what thoughts will remain only as thoughts, nothing more, and which will bear bitter fruit? We can never know for sure, which is why it's best to control our thoughts before they turn into something painful and damaging to ourselves and others.

Try this rather frightful, and horrific, experiment: Imagine if your thoughts were suddenly projected on a screen for everyone to see! What would be up there? What does this tell you about what's in your mind and what changes need to be made?

Bringing Every Thought Into Captivity

(2 Cor. 10:3-5).

Meditate on Paul's testimony in 2 Corinthians 10:3-5. Read it in different versions (if possible) and then answer the following questions:

1. What kind of battle does Paul say we are in?

2. What does it mean to be in a spiritual battle? How does it differ from a physical battle?

3. What is one of the “carnal” (the Greek word means “fleshly”) weapons that Christians don’t use? See John 18:36. What are the weapons that we need to use? See Eph. 6:10-18.

4. What are some of the “high things” that exalt themselves against the knowledge of God?

The word for “strongholds” in 2 Corinthians 10:4 means “castles” or “fortresses.” Paul doubtless is thinking of the inner fortresses of our hearts, the “castles” of our minds, the habits of sin and self that determine our character. The battle is one of truth against error, the knowledge of God against ignorance and superstition; it is a struggle of true worship against all forms of idolatry. In the end, it’s a great controversy between Christ and Satan for control of the race. All this occurs in the mind, in the heart; and only through the power of God working in our lives can we uproot the enemy.

Keeping in mind the context of what you’ve read today, why is control of our thoughts so crucial in the battle we are facing? Why, in many ways, is keeping control of our thoughts the whole battle?

Setting Your Mind on Things Above

(Col. 3:1, 2).

Even after we have received Jesus as Savior and Lord, it is still possible to become distracted by a multitude of earthly attractions. We easily can become preoccupied with things of secondary importance and forget we are called to set our minds on things above, not on things on the earth. After all, we physically live on the earth; we are constantly surrounded by things of the earth. And, indeed, many things of the earth are not, in and of themselves, bad (*see Gen. 1:31*). The key is to learn to know the difference.

What reason does Paul give for setting our minds on things above?

Col. 3:1, 2.

Let's look a little closer at what Paul is telling us here. Because we have been "raised with [Christ]" (*Col. 2:12, NKJV; see also Rom. 6:4*), that we have died to self (*Col. 3:3*) and now have a new life in Him, our thoughts should be on heavenly things, things "above" as compared to "things on earth"—the kind of things we thought about before we met Jesus. But now, because Jesus Christ died for us (*see Rom. 5:6*), has paid the penalty for our sins (*see Isa. 53:6*), has covered us with His perfect righteousness (*see Rom. 4:4-8*), and now is interceding in our behalf in heaven (*see Heb. 9:24*), we must now dwell upon Him and the great redemption He has wrought out for us (*see 1 Cor. 1:30*).

Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, is sitting at the right hand of the throne of God. We must always remember to focus our attention on our great High Priest, who has passed through the heavens and ever lives to make intercession for us.

"Fix your thoughts upon the Saviour. Go apart from the bustle of the world and sit under Christ's shadow. Then, amid the din of daily toil and conflict, your strength will be renewed."—Ellen G. White, *In Heavenly Places*, p. 62.

Take as much time as possible to dwell upon the plan of salvation, of Christ's taking on human flesh, of His substitutionary death in your behalf, of His ministry in the sanctuary above. Think about what it reveals about the character of God. Think about the hope it offers you. Think about the promises that are ours because of all this. Now, imagine if, day by day, you lived in such a heavenly atmosphere. How different would your life be?

Receiving a Sanctified Imagination

(Rom. 12:1, 2).

Read Romans 12:1, 2. Focusing on the theme of this week, write down what you believe Paul is telling us.

One of the precious gifts we have all received from our Creator is the gift of an imagination. Unfortunately, our imaginations have been corrupted by sinful thoughts and desires. We need our imaginations to be sanctified. Given the importance the Bible places on our thoughts, we should be encouraged to know there is power from above that will help us get control of our thoughts and our imaginations.

How does this renewal of our minds occur? Compare Rom. 12:1, 2 with Titus 3:5.

These two passages of Scripture contain the only references to the Greek noun translated as “renewing” or “renewal.” The radical transformation of our minds promised in Romans 12:2 can be accomplished only by the power of the Holy Spirit working in those Christians who have surrendered themselves to Him. God will work in us, even at the level of our imagination, but only to the degree we allow Him to. This surrender can, at times, demand an excruciating struggle on our part. As everyone has surely experienced, it’s very easy for our minds to wander and focus on forbidden themes, earthly, carnal things that are from below and not from above. No wonder that in Colossians 3:2 (see yesterday’s study) the literal translation of “set your affection” means “continually think of” heavenly things. Perhaps that’s partially why Paul says, too, that we should “pray always” (2 Thess. 1:11), because nothing can lift our thoughts as can prayer.

What are the ways you use your imagination? Is it working for or against your walk with the Lord? What can you do in order to make yourself more receptive to the “renewal” of your mind—that God promises?

Influences

Recently, a nation was horrified. A drunken, bedraggled homeless man in a big city was sleeping in an alley. A group of about three young men, seeing the unfortunate fellow, found a cannister of gasoline. As the man was sleeping, they doused him with the fuel and set him on fire. He died a horrible death.

When arrested and asked why they did such a terrible thing, one of the boys answered that they had seen something similar happen in a movie and simply copied what they saw.

Think about this episode. However extreme, what's the crucial principle we see expressed here?

As we've seen this week, God cares about our thoughts; and He has also promised us strength to change our thoughts. But whatever the power promises from above, God isn't going to just change our thoughts supernaturally. We just don't utter a prayer, "Lord, change my thoughts," and instantly we are pure in heart and mind. However nice that would be, it doesn't work that way. We have a definite role in cooperating with the Lord. To a great extent, the things we put in our minds will affect what things we think. The more you read about Jesus, the more you focus on holy things, then the more your thoughts will be about Jesus and holy things; the more you read about earthly, unholy things, the more your thoughts will be about unholy and earthly things. It is that simple.

How does **Philippians 4:8** capture the essence of this week's lesson? Write out each of these words (true, honest, just, pure, etc.), and under each heading list some things that fit in these categories (it would be interesting to compare your answers with others in class). How well are you following Paul's admonition regarding your thoughts?

Having trouble controlling your thoughts? Having trouble thinking of heavenly rather than earthly, carnal things? The answer to your problem could easily be found in what you are reading and watching. Only you can make the necessary changes. Why not, right now, under the power and influence of the Holy Spirit, determine seriously to censor the things that come into your mind? Otherwise, you will never have victory in this crucial aspect of Christian life.

Further Study: “The apostle sought to teach the believers how important it is to keep the mind from wandering to forbidden themes or from spending its energies on trifling subjects. Those who would not fall a prey to Satan’s devices, must guard well the avenues of the soul; they must avoid reading, seeing, or hearing that which will suggest impure thoughts.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 518.

“The training of the heart, the control of the thoughts, in cooperation with the Holy Spirit, will give control of the words. This is true wisdom, and will ensure quietness of mind, contentment and peace. There will be joy in the contemplation of the riches of the grace of God.”—Ellen G. White, *Mind, Character, and Personality*, vol. 2, p. 656.

“Those who would have that wisdom which is from God must become fools in the sinful knowledge of this age, in order to be wise. They should shut their eyes, that they may see and learn no evil. They should close their ears, lest they hear that which is evil and obtain that knowledge which would stain their purity of thoughts and acts. And they should guard their tongues, lest they utter corrupt communications and guile be found in their mouths.”—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 404.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Think about your own home. What things are there that tend to make it difficult for you to have purity of thoughts?
- 2 What crucial role does prayer and Bible study have in helping us have control of our thoughts?
- 3 What can you do as a church to help other members, particularly the young, protect themselves from the kind of negative influences that can make it very difficult to control their thoughts?
- 4 Read Ephesians 6:10-18. In what ways does this help provide a formula for victory in this crucial battle for our minds?

God Is Faithful, part 2

Maria Tzenova

My heart felt at peace as I traveled home that Friday afternoon. No matter what, I was going to follow God's leading. I still wondered what my parents would say if they knew I might lose my opportunity to study at the university. By the time I arrived home, I had decided not to tell my parents what had happened or what I had decided.

On Sabbath morning I went to church. I met a girl there who was studying at another university. After church I told her about my dilemma and asked her how she solved such problems. She told me that Bulgaria had laws to assure religious freedom, and that her teachers worked with her to accommodate her faith. I went home with new courage.

When I returned to the university, I wrote a letter to the dean, asking permission to skip lab classes on Sabbath. I wanted to deliver the letter in person, but she was not in. When I finally found her in, I was happily surprised to learn that the dean was also one of my lecturers. I explained my problem to her and gave her the letter. She gave me permission to miss the labs as long as I could prepare for the exams.

I left her office praising God for the wonderful way He had worked out my dilemma. It was several hours before I could settle down to study.

I returned home often during the rest of the semester and attended evangelistic meetings at my home church. At the end of the meetings my sister, my mother, and I were baptized together. Some time later, after lots of encouragement to step out in faith and let God take care of his job, my father also was baptized.

I think of this trial when I face other problems in my life. I learned how God can work out His will in my life, even when I cannot see how a solution is possible. He just wants me to trust Him and move out in faith, just as the Israelites had to step into the Jordan River before the water stopped flowing. We must step forward in faith.

I realize now that when I sat in that dim waiting room at the railway station, I was not alone. If God had opened my eyes, as He did for Elijah, I would have seen angels ministering to me as I struggled to make my decision.



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