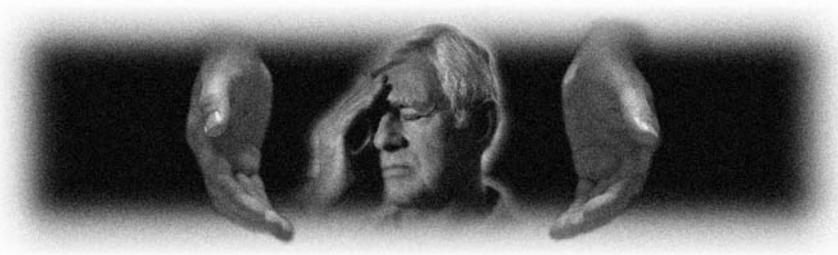


Lord of Our Thoughts



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, 1 Chronicles 28:9, Matthew 5:8, 1 Corinthians 2:16. 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?

Key Text: *Proverbs 23:7*

Teachers Aims:

1. To show how our thoughts are a spiritual battlefield.
2. To show how Jesus wants us to forget our old ways and become changed by renewing our minds.
3. To show how God is glorified when our thoughts are renewed.

Lesson Outline:

I. A Spiritual Battle (*Eph. 6:12*).

- A. What is at stake in the spiritual war?
- B. How does every sinful habit become a stronghold in this war? How do these habits shape our character?
- C. What is the only way we can forsake sin and defeat the enemy? (*John 15:1-8, 16:5-14*).

II. Looking Above (*Col. 3:2*).

- A. Describe ways we can keep our thoughts above earthly things.
- B. Why should we keep our minds on things that are edifying?

III. Glorifying God in Our Thinking (*Phil. 4:8*).

- A. What is the only way our minds can be transformed? (*1 Thess. 5:23*).
- B. Discuss ways that glorifying God in our thoughts enables us to do the will of the Father.
- C. As we allow the Lord to work in us, every imagination will be acceptable to Him.

Summary: We are faced with a spiritual battle. We can defeat sin and temptation by guarding our thoughts. Reading, seeing, and hearing things that edify and uplift our thoughts lead us heavenward while giving honor and glory to God.

COMMENTARY

Lord of Our Thoughts.

The mind is not the brain. The brain is the grey matter that resides in the cranium and operates according to certain physical properties. The mind is the pattern of thought. While the mind resides within the brain, it is an individual spiritual entity separate from it. The brain's function or dysfunction affects the mind and its pattern of thinking. The mind also can affect the brain, since our habits of thinking actually create physical pathways in our brain that affect our future thoughts.

The mind consists of patterns of perception and attention. It includes short-term, long-term, and sensory memory. The mind

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?

creates, perceives, and stores images. It solves problems, creates thoughts and ideas, and reasons through issues in a logical or illogical manner. We make decisions based on all these activities of the mind and the emotional significance of the decisions themselves.

Without Christ, we naturally have a mind informed solely by our wants and wishes. Our perceptions are limited, such as a horse's vision is limited by blinders. Our personal interpretation of events skews reality; and we can imagine only that which benefits us personally. Without Christ, we solve problems in ways that maximize our interests and pleasure. Our ideas and reasoning naturally do not consider the presence and power of God. So, we make decisions with no reference to the resources of heaven.

All is not hopeless, however, for in Philippians 2:5 the apostle Paul encourages us to have the mind of Christ. What does it mean, then, to have the mind of Christ? It means we will learn how to perceive things the way He does and to attend to the things He attends to. It means our memories will include an acknowledgment of God's presence, love, and action.

Having the mind of Christ means the images we perceive and create will be inspired by the reality of His involvement in our lives. In our problem solving, we will seek His wisdom and expect His grace to empower us. Our thoughts and ideas about people and things will be a reflection of God's thoughts and ideas. We will seek to reason in a logical and orderly manner, since Jesus is the Author of reason and logic. Based on His involvement in our lives, we will seek to make decisions that are in tune with that involvement and that depend on the power and resources of Heaven. To the extent that if we have the mind of Christ, we will enjoy the benefits of love, peace, and joy. Thinking about God, the world, and ourselves in the way Jesus thinks about them will progressively transform our minds to make them more like our Savior's mind.

We do not acquire the mind of Christ through some magic formula or in some instantaneous way. It takes effort and time. How can we learn to think the way Jesus does? It happens in the arenas of information, ideas, and images. We need the correct information about God, our world, and ourselves before we can form correct ideas about them and imagine them as God would. God's Word is the powerful and active agent for correcting the distorted information we have. God's Word informs us about how justice and mercy operate. It assures us that God's most basic characteristic is love. God's Word reveals we were created in His image and are all under the blight of sin. It reveals that regardless of our enmity toward God, He loves us.

Concerning our world, we learn from God's Word that He does not condemn it but loves it so much He sent His Son to die for it. We can know none of this unless God's Word speaks it from Scripture to our hearts.

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?

Once we get the correct information about God, ourselves, and our world, we will be able to form ideas about them that are a reflection of God's ideas. The images we form of them will progressively match the reality God created. We will suffer less from living contrary to reality and enjoy more the benefits from living in accordance with God's reality.

A transformed mind does not usually come about by intentional direct effort on our part. It is the by-product of immersing ourselves in God's powerfully creative Word through study, prayer, meditation, fasting, and other activities that allow God's light to shine in

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: *Romans 12:1, 2; 1 Corinthians 2:16; 2 Corinthians 10:3-5; Colossians 3:1, 2*

- 1 Paul urged the Christians in Rome to “be transformed by the renewing of [their] mind” (*Rom. 12:2, NIV*). The word *transformed* is the same word that describes the transformation of a caterpillar to a butterfly. That word is *metamorphosis*. Our metamorphosis from worldliness to Christianity comes when we feed on Christ and focus on being like Him. What specific methods have you found especially useful in helping you achieve this transformation?
- 2 Trying *not* to think about something is a useless exercise. As soon as you think of what it is you are trying not to think of, you have lost the battle. It is better to substitute something good for the bad you are trying not to think of. Read Galatians 5:22, 23. How does focusing on these things make it easier to refrain from harmful imaginings?
- 3 Paul wrote: “I pray that out of his glorious riches he [God the Father] may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith” (*Eph. 3:16, 17, NIV*). What difference would it make if Jesus lived in your house the way He lives in your heart? What kind of accommodations would you make in order for Him to be comfortable?
- 4 It is virtually impossible, short of going around blindfolded, not to notice the vain, profane, or suggestive images foisted on us by our modern culture. Yet, Paul urged the believers in Colossae to “set [their] minds on things above, not on earthly things” (*Col. 3:2, NIV*). What images fill your imagination when you set your mind on things above?

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?

our dark hearts. God's Word is like a light shining in a dark place. You don't need to do anything to banish the darkness; just let the light shine, and darkness disappears. Our part, then, is to allow God to shine the light into our minds and receive from Him insight into the practice of His way in our lives and in our world.

The end result will be freedom. It will be freedom from conformity to the natural ways of humanity. It will be freedom from all that enslaves us and blights our lives. It will be freedom to live as we were created to live with lives of love, joy, and peace.

Witnessing

How many times have we heard the cliché about being “so heavenly minded you're no earthly good”? While the point may be a valid one, in reality, it has been those who were most fixed on things above that did the most good here on earth.

It was Martin Luther King's “dream” of having all flesh see the glory of the Lord together that fueled the Civil Rights movement in the United States.

It was Mother Teresa's conviction that her hands should be the instruments of delivering daily bread “along with the love of God” that brought peace and joy to many of the world's poorest people in Calcutta.

It was Desmond Tutu whose understanding that God is seeking the restoration of what He first created that inspired among the people of South Africa and the world the ability to achieve what many saw as “idealistic.”

Indeed, it was Jesus' connection with His Father and love for His creation that transformed the lives of those with whom He came in contact and made salvation available to the world.

Is “this mind . . . in you, which was also in Christ Jesus” (*Phil. 2:5*)? What is your first thought in the morning? The last before going to sleep at night? Most important, what are these thoughts accomplishing in the world around you in between times? Proverbs 29:18 tells us that “where there is no vision, the people perish.” Are you being true to the vision the Lord has given you, or do you continue to ask what it is the Lord requires when the answer is given clearly in Scripture: “To do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God” (*Mic. 6:8, NKJV*)?

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.

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: Different sports require different forms of protective gear. Roller bladers wear helmets, as well as knee and elbow pads. Bicyclists wear helmets and shoes with toe clips. Continue this list, then discuss your personal experience with the armor Paul tells us is necessary for our spiritual journeys. (*See Eph. 6:10-18.*)

Thought Questions:

1 When you really get down and work in the dirt, your clothes get amazingly dirty. A washing machine will get those clothes clean, yet the old work clothes remain. Jesus invites and makes possible the total renewal of our minds, our very thought processes. Why is it necessary to allow the Holy Spirit to change your whole life focus? Why is Paul's admonition to "set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth" (*Col. 3:2, NKJV*) so crucial to our success?

2 News anchors report battles in diverse and faraway places in our world (sometimes even near at hand). The images portrayed are frightening and discouraging. The Bible makes us aware there is a very real battle being waged for our minds and allegiances. How can we avoid "victim mentality," which leads to inevitable defeat? Paul tells us we have the arsenal of heaven at our disposal and "divine power to demolish strongholds" (*2 Cor. 10:4, NIV*). Share how this gives you courage and the assurance of victory over wrong imaginations and thoughts.

Application Question:

Paul invites us to present our bodies, our very selves, as "living sacrifice[s]" (*Rom. 12:1*) to God and the cause of the gospel. This embodies an entire transformation of our natures, from selfish to serving. We become nonconformists to the patterns of this world (*Rom. 12:2*). How could this renewal be practically applied in your life? Make a list of activities you are gifted to perform on behalf of God's kingdom (e.g., sharing a scripture or word of encouragement with a struggling friend or neighbor). This week, plan to do at least one of the things on your list.

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?