

December 29, 2019
Sunday Evening Service
Communion
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
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YOU ARE WHAT YOU THINK

Philippians 4:8

You have heard it said that “We are what we eat.” If that was actually true, some folks would look like hot dogs, or potato chips, or candy. But it is true that if we do not follow a healthy diet our bodies will show the effects.

In the same way, “We are what we think.” Watch how people respond in any given situation. It is typical and expected for a person to laugh when their circumstances are funny. Or it is also expected that a person will express anger, or frustration, or stress, or even anxiety in situations that draw out those emotions. But what if emotions take over even if there is very little stimuli? That is evidence that we are what we think.

Emotions are not simply thoughts. They are the response of our natural body or flesh. Sadly, emotions can control us, at which point we become “disordered.” Even secular psychotherapists understand that feelings of anxiety, depression, anger, shame, or guilt can be so overwhelming that the victim cannot function according to societal norms.

I am reading an interesting book titled, *Mind and Emotions: A Universal Treatment for Emotional Disorders*. It is a work about techniques for Cognitive Behavior Therapy. Written by secularists, the book proposes, “Emotional problems are often blamed on stress, trauma, early upbringing, interpersonal conflicts, hormones, and genetics. But surprisingly, research shows that another factor is much more responsible for emotional disorders: our coping behaviors.” (Matthew McKay, Patrick Fanning, and Patricia Zurita Ona, *Mind and Emotions: A Universal Treatment for Emotional Disorders*, Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications, 2011, 18.)

Okay, so how do we fix the problem? How do we learn to cope with unfavorable circumstances appropriately? Later in the book the authors propose that one important coping mechanism is “mindfulness.” In my repertoire of solutions the word means “right thinking.” The authors of the book say, “Mindfulness is crucial to emotion regulation for another reason too. It helps you see your emotions as only one part of the present moment. Whether you’re happy, angry, sad, or whatever, the emotion is just a single aspect of your current experience.” (Ibid, 48) That is no doubt true.

Therefore, it seems reasonable to conclude that we are responsible to use our minds to control our responses. It seems logical that if we control our responses, we will be more productive, more useful, more congenial, more relational in life. It seems biblical that if we are going to be used in the Lord’s service, we need to represent Him as we interact with others, especially when we desire to tell others the Good News of salvation. Think about it.

What we think, how we think, why we think what we think, shapes our lives. Which means that our thinking will mold our character. Therefore, if we are thinking in line with God’s character, we will be shaped into that model. If we are thinking according to the world’s character, we will be shaped into that model. If we have been taught to think according to God’s character, but we actually try to think according to the world’s character, in order to be acceptable to the world, we are going to experience conflict and be confused. Sometimes that confusion is so powerful that it owns us and we become of no value to the world or to Christ.

How we think is critically important. Let’s spend a few minutes quickly perusing several passages of Scripture in which God has already laid out the instruction for us in this very important realm.

Think Heavenly Thoughts. (Colossians 3:1-3)

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God (Colossians 3:1-3).

In much literature, the opening words of this passage would be considered a conditional statement. It consists of a hypotheses followed by a conclusion and is called an “If-then” statement or a conditional statement.

In this verse the hypotheses is very obvious: *If then you have been raised with Christ (v.1a)*. This statement, this instruction, is addressed to the person who is “in Christ.” To be raised with Christ is to be identified with Christ in crucifixion and in baptism. The believer in Christ recognizes that he has so identified with Christ’s crucifixion that he has died regarding his own strength and wisdom and lives by the gift of God’s faith in Christ (Galatians 2:20).

The believer in Christ actualizes deadness to self in complete identification with Christ’s death on the cross, and burial, and resurrection. We picture that threefold identification when we are baptized in Christ. Paul put it like this: *We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his (Romans 6:4-5)*.

Because this identification is an actual occurrence, this statement moves from a hypothetical “if” statement to the certainty of a “since” statement. To that end, we might translate the statement, *“Since it is true that you have already been raised with Christ . . .”* Do what? There should be some kind of requirement or response to the “since” statement. Indeed there is a conclusion. Since we have already been raised with Christ, we should seek things that are above. *Seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God (v.1b)*.

Things that are above are outside the passing things of this world, the things tainted by sin. Things above are ideas, thoughts, concepts, truths that are found in the presence of God. Christ our Savior has been seated in the environment of perfect righteousness and holiness since the day He ascended into the heavens. The “things” in Christ’s presence are truths that characterize God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Things that are above consist of Bible truth as opposed to worldly wisdom or even our own human wisdom or feelings.

What is to be our response to those “other earthly” things? We are to seek them. To seek is to search after diligently in order to find. God never sends His people on a wild goose chase. He promises that we will find Him when we search for Him (Matthew 7:7). We are to be characterized by seeking God-kind of ideas. How? How do we go about this searching in order to find?

You must *set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth (v.2)*. To *set your mind* is not a complicated idea. It simply means “think.” Therefore, our need is to keep on thinking about the environment where Christ is. We seek the character of heaven by “thinking” the character of heaven.

Why should we do this? In answer to that question, we move from a “since-then” statement to a non-negotiable statement. Seek those things that are above, *for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God (v.3)*. The reason we should think outside the passing stuff of this world is because we have died. Obviously, this cannot mean that we have died literally. It means that we have died in our opinion, our conclusion, regarding control of life and destiny.

The only way to eternal life is through death to self. The problem is that the self doesn’t want to die. The self is very alive and powerful. We are to consider, reckon, conclude that we have died to our own control and ambitions (which control and ambition keep people out of eternal life). That is what Paul meant by, *So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus (Romans 6:11)*.

And because the “self” idol is so powerful, we have to renew consideration of the reality of its death every day (1 Corinthians 15:31). We need constant reminders that we have already in the past died to all that is of the world and passing away (including our flesh) when we died to the penalty of sin. Christ was crucified to pay the penalty for sin. We died to that penalty when we identified with Christ.

And because of our identity with Christ, we are hidden with Christ in God. This can mean that we are hidden away safe and secure for eternity. That’s good. It also means that the passing world (including our own flesh) cannot comprehend our relationship in Christ (it is hidden from plain view). It is very hard to explain the reason, purpose, meaning of right thinking to unsaved people. They

typically respond, “Why would I want to do that?” Thinking “Christ in heaven” thoughts is a spiritual exercise not just a mental exercise. Only born again people can do it. How often do you do that?

Take Thoughts Captive. (2 Corinthians 10:5)

We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5).

The interpretation of this statement and, therefore, the primary application is in connection with the sinful world’s arguments against God. Spiritual warfare is a battle against the lies against God that take people captive. Our warfare is against citadels of falsehood, contradictions to the truth of the Bible. These are outsourced from Satan and find lodging in human wisdom.

What is our goal in spiritual warfare? We seek to defeat conflicting arguments in and about Christ. Our objective in spiritual warfare is to change the way people think. Our plan is to expose and refute the error of false assertions. To bring error into captivity to Christ is to deliver the victim of error from sin and Satan into salvation in Christ. Jude described it as our efforts to *save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh (Jude 1:23)*. That is the primary idea of this text.

However, we are also justified to make an application of the principle to the thoughts of Christians that are also often opposed to God. We struggle with appropriate thinking in relation to Christ because of the unrelenting nature of our flesh. It is not that Christians are always opposed to God. But yielding to our natural desires, we pit ourselves, our feelings, our thoughts against God’s truth.

Should we then not control our thoughts to obey Christ? The real “us,” the eternal spirit is responsible to control the thoughts. God expects us to bring our thoughts into captivity to the truth of Christ we find in the Bible that we read every day. Do you fight that battle? Do you ever wrestle to keep your thoughts captive to Christ?

Think Prepared Thoughts. (1 Peter 1:13)

Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:13).

Here is the command for us who follow Christ to prepare our minds for action. Or it means that the individual is responsible for his or her your thoughts. *Therefore, preparing your minds for action (v.13a)* points again to the need for our eternal spirit to be responsible to pull together our thoughts. “Free thinking” and follower of Christ are contradictory ideas. We are not free to think whatever we want to think.

A second command requires us to keep our thoughts well balanced. We are to be characterized by *being sober-minded (v.13b)*. This means that we are responsible not to be intoxicated by the world, flesh, and devil. You know from some experience, no doubt, that intoxicated people do not think clearly. Neither do followers of Christ when they refuse to collect their thoughts, direct their thinking, Christ-ward.

The positive command in this instruction requires us to focus our thoughts. That is what *set your hope fully (v.13c)* means. Of course, the idea of hope here is not wishing it would happen or betting on whether it will come about. Hope is steadfast confidence. Hope is what we think about Christ’s promises. Will God keep His promises? Hope says, “Of course He will.” We are responsible to keep our hope focused.

More precisely, we are to set our hope on Christ’s work. Set our hope *on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ (v.13d)*. On one hand, we need to think about the grace God has already poured out on us through Christ. On the other hand, there is still much grace to come as God completes the work He has begun in us. When was the last time you thought about that?

Think Humble Thoughts. (Philippians 2:5-7)

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the

form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men (Philippians 2:5-7).

The command is, *Have this mind among yourselves (v.5a)*. In other words, God expects all of us Christians to think like this. No independent, maverick attitude in this matter. We must control our thoughts, decide to think like this, because our attitude is determined by how we think.

The example of right thinking and, therefore, right attitude is Christ. He is the example, *which is yours in Christ Jesus (v.5b)*. Our example of humility is Christ who humbled Himself. *Who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. (vv.6-7)*

Simply put this requires us to remind ourselves that we are not more important than Christ. In fact, we are really not more important than others. Then, we must conclude that life does not exist or continue simply to make us happy or comfortable. We must think properly, accurately about ourselves in order to come to this conclusion.

Think Right Thoughts. (Philippians 4:8)

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things (Philippians 4:8).

Here is a list of thoughts that qualify for “right thinking.” These are godly traits. These traits are illustrative of God’s character. At the same time, we know that it is true that these traits are generally not found in the natural, fallen flesh. In other words, we cannot put our minds in neutral and expect our thoughts to be characterized by godliness.

These traits include the entire scope of life. Name any area or aspect of life and these traits apply. We should be able to make the application in everything throughout the day. We must make application because God has given us a clear command: *think about these things (Philippians 4:8a)*. The Greek verb translated, “think about it” means to reckon, calculate, evaluate. This is what an

accountant does with all the numbers. The numbers mean something, are intentional, come to an accurate conclusion. How much time do we spend intentionally applying godly character to the stuff of our life?

Go to the mall, watch tv, go to the movies, hang out with your friends and ask questions like, “Is that true?” Or, “Is what he just said honorable?” Or, “Is that response just, righteous?” Or, “Is my attitude lovely, commendable?” Or, “Is my work ethic pure?” Or, “Are my desires worthy of praise from God?”

This is not a Sunday-only kind of practice. We are to obey this command all the time. It is written in a present tense, middle voice, imperative. You and I are responsible to think like this all the time.

Think “Christ in You” Thoughts. (Romans 8:5-10)

For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God (Romans 8:5-8).

This text alerts us to a conflict. On one hand, some people in life live according to the flesh. They are characterized as: *those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh (v.5a)*. That is not a good thing even though it is a normal and typical thing. It is bad because *to set the mind on the flesh is death (v.6a)*. Worse is that *the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot (v.7)*. And so, *those who are in the flesh cannot please God (v.8)*.

In contrast to the majority of people in life, some people live according to the Spirit. *But those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit (v.5b)*. That is a good thing because *to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace (v.6b)*.

This contrast sets up a critical variable. It forces us to ask ourselves this question: “Are you flesh or Spirit?” The Bible gives us the answer based on the evidence in our lives, *You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you.*

Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him (v.9). We cannot be wholly governed by the flesh and also governed by the Spirit. Some people are religious but have no influence or conviction of the Holy Spirit. They are not born again and cannot think in line with God's truth.

The antidote to thinking according to the world and the flesh is Christ "in" you. *But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness (Romans 8:10).* Christ in us gives us vitality, eternal life now. We are able to set our thinking on the work of the Holy Spirit because He is in us.

Think Bible Thoughts. (Psalm 119:36)

Incline my heart to your testimonies, and not to selfish gain (Psalm 119:36)!

According to this simple statement, each follower of God is responsible to have our hearts "inclined." First, let's remind ourselves of the definition of the "heart." It is the seat, the center, of the intellect, will, and emotions. All of this is to be controlled by the eternal spirit that is alive in our bodies, the real us. The requirement in this case is not that we are to bend our intellect, will, and emotions to God's testimonies. Rather, we are to yield to God the Holy Spirit who bends our hearts to Himself.

In the bending of our thoughts, we discover two conflicting targets. It is natural to think about selfish gain. Selfish gain is not just money or possessions. It is that which benefits "self." So we can ask these penetrating questions: Why do you want to feel better physically? Why do you want to feel better about yourself? Why do you want to be free from conflict? Why do you want to have more money? Those seem like silly questions in light of normal life. Of course we want to feel well, be free from conflict, have money and live a comfortable life.

Where does God's will fit into that picture? Does it matter? In most pictures of everyday life, we, in our thoughts, replace God. We are the idols who not only want to, but will, take glory that belongs to our Creator.

A person with a chronic illness told me this illustration one time. His friend asked, "Now really, why do you want to be free from

this illness?" The guy said, "Well, obviously, I am tired of hurting, tired of not being able to function as a normal human being." So, the friend asked, "You asked God to relieve the illness, right?" "Of course." "So what if you are ill until the day you die, but the moment you get to heaven you are instantly whole, what will you think?" "I think that would be great. I look forward to being in heaven, free from sickness." "Oh," the friend said. "I thought maybe you wanted to be in heaven to be in the presence of Christ your Savior who died for you." "Ah . . . well yes, that too." "But what if it was Christ's will that while you were on earth, He planned to get glory for Himself through your sickness (i.e. Paul's thorn in the flesh)? Won't you feel a bit guilty if when you get to heaven you realize that all you ever really wanted in life was for you to be better, not Christ to be glorified?"

We so easily turn ourselves into idols who replace Christ! Don't let the fallen flesh be your standard of thinking. This is where we need to admit that it is good to be corrected. And it is corrective to think about the Bible. The Psalmist prayed, *Incline my heart to your testimonies.* The truth about God that God has given us. It is not likely that we will think about Bible truth if we seldom read the Bible.

I think that many professing Christians, especially those who have not matured in the faith, hear things like this and conclude, "That's impossible." "I can't do that." "In fact, no one I know consistently thinks like that." Conversely, the Christian who is maturing adopts this attitude: "God, I really struggle with these principles that require right thinking." "Would you give me a little hope, a little victory, some success today as I try to control my thinking?"