

The Christian Mind

One of the biggest challenges of life is to gain mastery over our minds. James laments the destructive nature of the tongue, and man's inability to tame it. Actually the problem is not the tongue itself, but the words coming forth from our thoughts. Sinful words come from an uncontrolled mind, or rather, a mind controlled by pride and various lusts and evil emotions. Deeper than that, if we ask why the mind is so influenced to evil thoughts, it is because of a wicked heart. Unconverted man is corrupt and totally incapable of genuine, disinterested good.

The basic answer to this situation is the new heart that God creates in the believer in the new birth.

Ezek. 36:26-27 – “A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.”

Jer. 31:33 – “but this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.” (see also 32:38-40)

This new heart gives us a completely different way of looking at God, ourselves, and the world. We do not see things the same way, or think the same way we did. If salvation was nothing more than the forgiveness of sins it would be good, but God does much more than that. He doesn't just forgive us and leave us in the same heart condition. He changes us so that we can actually live above sin. The corrupt heart that served as a seedbed of sin and death has now been replaced, so we can freely communicate with God, and bring forth fruit unto life. Our hearts are now receptive to the things of God.

Experience has shown however, that even with a renewed heart, we live in a corrupt world, and are constantly confronted by various kinds of temptations which sometimes derail good intentions, and we fall into evil thinking, words, and actions. John acknowledges this in 1 Jn. 1:8 - 2:1 – “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ... My little children, these things I write unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.”

Another way to look at this is that even though we are new creations when we believe, and have become the sons of God with new hearts, those hearts need to be continually renewed – Rom. 12:2 (“And be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind ...”).

So we need to “stay prayed up”. As soon as we recognize that some action, word, or even thought is wrong, we need to confess it as sin, believe that Christ cleanses us, and then proceed with life. Too many people allow sin to remain unconfessed and unrepented of. Then it starts to grow, like a weed of the soul, and will only become more difficult and painful to root out later. Not only that, but it serves as a barrier between us and the Father, and we no longer can hear him speaking to us.

In all this we see the necessity of gaining mastery over our minds, something that before conversion was not possible because of the wicked heart. With a new heart, we have the ability besides the necessity of controlling our thoughts. But how is this to be done?

There are two ways to cultivate a pure and holy mind, one that can freely speak to, and hear, the Spirit of God. One is positive (cultivating good thoughts), and the other is negative (removing bad thoughts).

Gaining Control over Evil Thoughts

Jesus tells us that sins originate in the heart. The heart produces evil thoughts, and then if we yield to them, to evil deeds. Mt. 15:19 – “For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies:”. This is why we need to remember Prov. 4:23 – “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.”

We must recognize that even though we live in a sinful world, we do not have to submit to its deceptions. As Christian believers we are in a spiritual warfare, and we have spiritual weapons with which to resist the devil.

2 Cor. 10:3-5 – “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds;) casting down imaginations, and every high

thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ."

We must take care not to allow tempting thoughts to linger. Satan can suggest a sinful thought, but if you entertain it and linger with it, then it becomes sin.

Job 31:1 – "I made a covenant with mine eyes; why then should I think upon a maid?"

Ps. 101:3 – "I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes ..." (e.g., pornography, MSNBC, late night "comedy", ...)

In computer programming there is a phrase which applies, "Garbage in, garbage out".

Eph. 4:29-32 – "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers. And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."

Filling Our Minds with Good Thoughts

Evil deeds start with evil thoughts, and evil thoughts come from the heart. It is possible to have evil thoughts without following up with actual deeds (maybe through the fear of consequences, like prison time). But Jesus said to look on a woman with lust is to commit adultery in the heart. So it is not enough just to stop sinning outwardly. We must root out the sins of the heart.

Ps. 51:10 – "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me."

How can we maintain our new heart, the clean heart that God gave us at conversion? As stated above:

1. *Promptly confess and repent of all known sin. Pray that God will reveal to you anything that you are not aware of.*
2. *Resist wicked imaginations, take thoughts captive to Christ.*

But then we need to take positive steps:

3. Fill our minds with the Word of God

How can we obey it, or draw strength and comfort from it, if we don't read, or somehow hear it?

Ps. 119:11 – "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee."

4. Don't just read it – meditate on it.

Ps. 63:6 – "When I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches."

Ps. 119:97 – "O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day."

5. As much as possible, keep the mind free from distractions, so you are free to think about God and His Word in daily life.

In the parable of the rich fool, God said, "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?"

In the parable of the sower and the seed, he says of the seed sown among thorns, "the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful."

6. Be still and listen to God. See prayer, not just as making requests, but as a time of fellowship with God, a time to hear him speaking to you.

Ps. 139:17 – "How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them!"

Ps. 94:19 – "In the multitude of my thoughts within me thy comforts delight my soul."

7. Resolve to be obedient to what God shows you.

Ps. 119:105 – "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." Obey by walking in the right path.

Jer. 7:23 – "But this thing commanded I them, saying, Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people: and walk ye in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well unto you."

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