

THE BIBLE AND YOUR THOUGHTS

OVERVIEW:

1. Our hearts (desires, emotions and thoughts) are *not* naturally good, due to the effects of sin on them. Yet God has graciously offered us salvation from our sins, a new heart that desires to serve him, and the Bible, which teaches us how to live.
 2. Once saved, we no longer enjoy sin the way we used to; yet we still struggle with the habits and temptations of our past. We can overcome these old ways when we acknowledge our helplessness and trust God to use the Bible to strengthen us.
 3. Temptation begins with evil thoughts in the heart. To overcome temptation, we must replace the evil thoughts and desires that trouble us with new thoughts and desires that are pleasing to God. (We trust in God's power to give us success in doing so.)
 4. It is very important to let the Bible influence our thinking. We need to meditate on (think about or reflect upon) the things in the Bible, and let them change our thought patterns (the way we think). Doing this will increase our ability to have God-pleasing thoughts, to resist temptation, and to live a godly life.
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The Bible uses the term "heart" to refer to all of a person's mental and moral activity. It is the source of all one's emotions, thoughts and desires.

The Bible teaches us that what is in a person's heart (his desires, emotions and thoughts) will show itself in his actions and works. And since each person is born with sin in his heart, these actions and words are not naturally good.

It is written in God's Word:

**"There is no one who does what is right, not even one;
there is no one who understands or who looks to find God.
They have all turned away.**

**As a group, they have become totally worthless;
there is no one who does what is good, not even one." Romans 3:10-12**

There is no one on earth who is so righteous that he always does good and never sins. Ecclesiastes 7:20

From within, from the depths of one's heart, comes evil thoughts, sexual immorality, stealing, murder, adultery, greed, deceit, lustful conduct, envy, slander, pride and folly. Mark 7:21-22

Yet God, in his gracious kindness, has provided a way to escape from this type of life - a salvation from our sins. He gives us a new hope and a new heart - a heart that desires to follow him, rather than following the ways of sin.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy, he has given us birth into a new life. Now we have a living confidence - made possible because Jesus Christ came back to life from the dead. 1 Peter 1:3

**"I will put my teachings in their hearts. I will write them on their minds."
Hebrews 10:16b**

Furthermore, God graciously teaches us how to live. Using the Bible, the Holy Spirit judges our thoughts and attitudes, and changes them. He uses the commands, promises and warnings of Scripture to teach us and to change us, to warn us, and to encourage us. Consider some of the things mentioned in the following verses:

The word of God is living, and active. It is sharper than any double-edged sword, and can pierce deep enough to separate soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It exposes even the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight; everything is uncovered and exposed before his eyes. He is the one to whom we must give account. Hebrews 4:12-13

God's kindness is now available to all. It brings us salvation, teaching us to turn away from godless living and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives Titus 2:11-12

Every Scripture passage comes from the breath of God, and is useful for teaching. Scripture shows people what is wrong in their lives and how they must change. It trains people to live in a way that has God's approval. In this way, God's people are completely prepared for doing every kind of good work. 2 Timothy 3:16-17

Having been saved, we now discover that the sin we once enjoyed we no longer enjoy. Even when we yield to the temptation to sin, it does not bring to us the enjoyment that it once did. Instead, we discover that there is a battle going on in our hearts: a battle between the ways of God (the desires that the Holy Spirit puts into our hearts) and our former way of life (the habits and desires we had *before* God changed us - often called the "flesh," the "sinful nature," or some similar term).

These two ways of thinking (and living) *cannot* exist together peacefully:

A mind controlled by the corrupt nature is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law - in fact it cannot do so. Those who are controlled by the corrupt nature cannot please God. You, however, are not controlled by the

corrupt nature, but by the Spirit - if the Spirit of God lives in you. And anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. Romans 8:7-9

We struggle with the ways of the flesh. When we try in *our own* strength to conquer them, we find that we cannot succeed. We end up crying out, as the apostle Paul did:

What a miserable person I am! Who will rescue me from this body controlled by death? Romans 7:24

Yet, like the apostle Paul, we do not need to give up in despair! For look at his answer to the question:

Thanks be to God! He rescues through Jesus Christ our Lord! Romans 7:25a

When we live by the Spirit - when we humble ourselves (acknowledging our helplessness) and trust in *God's* strength, we can overcome the ways of the flesh. (Even though the *temptation* to sin will still be present, we do not have to *yield* to it.) As we submit *our* thinking to the teachings of Scripture, we can overcome the ways of the flesh. And the place to start is in our hearts.

The Bible tells us that temptation begins with our "evil desires" (James 1:14). And so, to conquer sin and temptation, this is where we should begin. The Bible tells us:

Let the Lord Jesus Christ influence everything you do. Don't think about ways to accomplish what the corrupt nature desires. Romans 13:14

We need to *replace* such evil thoughts with godly thoughts. (It is difficult, or impossible, to *stop* thinking about one thing unless you *replace* it with something else to think about.)

Finally, brothers, whatever is true and honorable, whatever is right and pure, whatever expresses beauty, whatever deserves respect - anything that is excellent or praiseworthy - think about such things. Philippians 4:8

We are told,

... focus your attention on the higher standard of things above. Let things that are above influence the way you think, not things on the earth. Colossians 3:1a, 2

In other words, we are to focus our attention on thinking (and living) in a way that pleases God: putting to death the sinful desires of the flesh (Colossians 3:5+) and reinforcing within ourselves the attitudes and life that come from Christ (Colossians 3:12+).

God gave us the Bible to enable us to do these things. (The Holy Spirit, of course gives us the power necessary to succeed.) Some examples of the ways God uses the Bible to teach us include the following:

(A) God gave us the experiences of Israel to teach us.

These things have become examples to teach us, so that we might not desire evil things, as they did. 1 Corinthians 10:6

(B) The apostle Peter considered it very important for people to be constantly reminded of the things that he (and the other apostles) taught. Those things needed to be a part of their thinking. (2 Peter 1:12-15)

(C) The Psalms have much to say about making the Bible the major influence in all of one's heart and life.

(D) When God gave Israel the Ten Commandments, he also told them that his commands were to be upon their hearts, and were to influence everything they did in life.

These commands I am giving you today must remain in your heart.

And you must sharpen your children's understanding of them:

**Talk about them both at home and away,
both when you go to sleep and when you wake up.**

**Wear them as a bracelet on your wrist,
and as a headband, to remind you.**

**Write them on the doorframes of your house
and on your gates outside. Deuteronomy 6:6-9**

[In other words, the Ten Commandments were to have an influence on everything they thought and did.]

(E) The word "meditate" is frequently used in the Psalms (especially Psalm 119, which is devoted entirely to the value of the Bible in a person's life). This word has reference to things that we repeatedly think about. "Meditating on Scripture" would include activities such as the following:

1. Thinking about specific Scripture passages (perhaps even memorizing them).
2. Thinking about other Scripture passages that deal with the same topic.
3. Trying to understand the meaning and significance of the passage. (If you cannot understand a passage, leave it for a while and study another passage.)
4. Trying to learn from it, asking questions such as, "Can I learn anything from this passage that would apply to the way I live?" or "What areas of my life must I change?" or "How should this passage influence the way I think, or my attitude about [whatever the verse is talking about]?" or any other question that might be appropriate for the passage.

A look at the ways that the word "meditate" is used in the Psalms will provide good insight in how we can change the thoughts of our heart:

1. The psalmist has a deep desire that *everything* he thinks about (the meditations of his heart) be pleasing to God. (Psalms 19:14; 104:34) This should also be *our* desire.

2. The psalmist thinks about God:
 - a. his unfailing love (Psalm 48:9)
 - b. his wonders (Psalm 119:27)
 - c. His works and deeds - both in creation and in the lives of his people (Psalms 77:12; 143:5; 145:5)

3. The psalmist thinks about God's word, using many words to describe it, such as "law", "precepts", "decrees", "statutes", and "promises." (Psalms 1:2, 119:15,23,48,78,97,99,148). Note that Psalm 119 (the longest chapter in the Bible) is an excellent example of meditating on the value of the Bible.

If we do these things, we will be much better prepared to think (and as a result, to live) in a way that pleases God. We will be much better prepared to trust God in *all* the circumstances of life (both good and bad). We will be much better prepared to serve God in everything we do.

Psalm 1

Blessed is the person

**who does not follow the advice of the wicked,
or choose the way of sinners,
or associate with those who mock,
but who instead delights in the teachings of the Lord,
and thinks about those teachings day and night.**

**He is like a tree planted by streams of water
- a tree that produces fruit in its season,
and whose leaves do not wither.**

Everything he does prospers.

Not so for the wicked!

**They are like empty grain husks
that the wind blows away.**

**So the wicked will not be left standing at the judgment.
Sinners will not be left standing with the righteous people.**

**For the Lord watches over the way of righteous people,
but the way of the wicked leads to destruction.**