

Sermon Notes of Rev.Dr.I.J.W.Oakley (1-11-1992 Cleland Baptist Church)

Philippians 4:8

Additional Bible reading: Colossians 3

Introduction

How we use our minds is so important as Christians. The things that go on in our minds deeply influence us and determine the kind of Christian life we live. People have said in the past, never mind what beliefs you have, as long as you are sincere and do your best, you can believe what you like. People are not so dogmatic about this nowadays. We live in a crime-ridden society, and there is a growing realization of the place of the mind in all this. The mind is where it all begins – and how easily the mind can be influenced by what we read in the papers, watch on the TV, think about, talk about, and these things will influence our conduct.

Sow a thought; reap an action.

Sow an action; reap a habit.

Sow a habit; reap a character.

Sow a character; reap destiny.

Your thoughts matter!

One of the reasons why Communism spread so rapidly was the spread of communist literature. People read and thought about communism, and soon worked for communism. Note what this tells us about the influence for good of Christian literature, in influencing people in the direction of spiritual things.

We are going to consider the Bible teaching on how important the mind is, and then how we control the mind, especially in the light of our text.

Consideration of the importance of the mind

Both the Old and the New Testaments stress the place of the mind for the people of God, and for all others. Starting at the judgement of the world in the time of Noah, **every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time** (Genesis 6:5). The people's thought led to evil actions, and brought God's judgement down on themselves **As a man think in his heart, so is he** (Proverbs 23:7). The real self and the real person is not reflected in what we say – we can all say the right things and try to make the right impression – but the real us is what is going on in our minds. No one knows the real person except God and ourselves.

From within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these things come from inside and make a man unclean (Mark 7:21-23). People look at our crime-ridden society, and conclude that better housing, less poverty and full employment would be the answer. These things certainly would help, but they would not get to the root of the problem. These conditions only bring out that which is in the heart and thoughts. Those with nice houses, good jobs and big bank balances – are they perfect, model characters, with all their problems solved?

The only solution is conversion. When someone becomes the child of God, God's life and nature enters his soul, and he is changed in a Godward direction. He has new capacity for spiritual interests and spiritual truths. His mind can be filled with spiritual truth and used for God. By His power we are responsible for using our minds aright. We must give our minds over to God and use them for Him.

We do not simply drift into this. We still have a sinful nature, and Satan constantly seeks to tempt us, the world seduces us. So we need to take positive steps by the power of the Holy Spirit. **The mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace** (Romans 8:6).

There are two aspects to consider, the negative and the positive. We need to be beware lest our minds are captured by things which would draw us from God. We have to "flee", to get out of the way of evil, and avoid the situations that would encourage us to drift from God. "You cannot stop birds flying over your head, but you can stop them from making a nest in your hair" (Luther). In the Rocky Mountains you will see notices saying "Beware of Bears", but also giving advice about not doing anything which would attract bears.

When we consider the company we keep, the things we watch on TV, the articles we are drawn to read in papers and magazines, are we really surprised that we are not growing in grace? We will not progress when there is something inside poisoning our minds.

On the positive side, we need to take active steps to fill our minds with spiritual things, that are godly and clean. **Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God** (Colossians 3:1). **Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus** (Philippians 2:5 AV). Christ's mind in us – having the thoughts and outlook of Christ fill our minds. This is what will happen when we allow the Holy Spirit to fill us.

This will mean in practice that God's word will have a very important place in our lives. When Joshua was taking control of the Children of Israel, he said, **Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night** (Joshua 1:8). One of the tragedies today is that we memorize so little of God's Word. Happy is the man who has memorized the Bible when he is assaulted by the Devil. Just like Jesus answered the Devil by quoting "It is written..." he can recall the very words of God to help him respond. When the mind is full of God, His Word and His truth, evil loses its hold on life. The secret poisoning going on from within is stopped. "This book will keep you from sin, and sin will keep you from this book."

We also ought to consider our reading generally. How much Christian reading do we do? The quality is varied of course, but books full of spiritual teaching and examples of holy living can help build us up and edify us.

So the mind is very important. It shapes our words and actions, and the general tenor of our lives. We cannot expect to make progress in the Christian life unless Christ brings every thought into captivity.

Control of the mind, in light of Philippians 4:8

There is a story from ancient times of sirens, or women singers, who lived on a rocky island, and whose beautiful singing lured sailors in passing ships to be wrecked on the rocks. Ulysses escaped danger by stopping his ears with wax, and he lashed himself to the mast. Orpheus escaped danger by having music on his own ship which was more beautiful, so he safely sailed by without being drawn to the sirens.

Here is God's beautiful music to drown the noise of the world and the allurements of the Devil. To conquer we must replace. If the Spirit controls our minds, these are the things we shall listen to: **Whatever is true** – that which is not deceptive or false, but which is reliable and dependable. It will not fail us or let us down if it is in accord with what God has revealed. **Whatever is noble** – worthy of respect, not flippant, empty, cheap or frivolous. **Whatever is just** – things which honour duty to God and men, in line with God's will and God's law. **Whatever is pure** – not shabby, base, sordid or sensual. Clean in word, thought and deed, standing up to God's scrutiny. **Whatever is lovely** – pleasing, attractive and beautiful. Things that are not bitter and harsh but are kind, forbearing and sympathetic. **Whatever is admirable** – well spoken of and talked of among Christians, and fit for God to hear. High toned, and not defiled.

If anything is excellent – anything which would spur us on to do better and reach new heights, so that we are the very best we can be for God. **If anything is praiseworthy** – worth commending to others, for it will not harm or defile them, praised by godly men and by God Himself. **Think about such things** - λογίξεσθε is the present middle imperative – not occasionally or when we feel like it, but habitually dwelling on these things, being absorbed by them and reflecting on them. When our minds are not otherwise engaged, we should turn our minds in this direction. The mind will always focus on something, and if it thinks long enough and often enough about something, that thing will begin to dominate everything else. So make sure that thing satisfies these qualities.

By this, we counteract evil, and we fill our minds with things that make us more Christ-like, spiritually mature, strong, conformed to the image of God's Son.

There was once a new Christian who was making great progress in the Christian life, in fact he seemed to outstrip others. The reason for it was that when he was younger, before he was converted, he trained bulldogs to fight. He never allowed a dog in training to have much to eat. "If I spied a bone in the street, I said 'Tom', and the dog would look at me. We walked on, and as long as his eyes were on me, we could get past the bone without the dog being tempted. When I am tempted, the Holy Spirit says 'Tom', and as long as I am obedient and keep my eyes on Christ, I get past the danger."

Conclusion

Your mind matters. It is where all the problems begin, and also where the seeds of victory and triumph are sown. Everything depends on how we use our minds. Set your mind on things above. Have the mind of Christ. Meditate on the Scriptures. Be careful

what you read and fill your mind with. **Whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things.**