

## Battle for the Mind – Lesson 1

### You are What You Think

#### Introduction:

Have you ever considered what effect the way you think has on the way you live your life? What goes on in the unseen reaches of your thought life has an impact on your life. It affects, for instance, your attitudes, hopes and fears, the way you speak, your personal philosophy of life, how you react to others, how you do your job and how you fulfill your family responsibilities.

Out of his God-given wisdom Solomon encapsulated this principle in a single phrase:

Proverbs 23:7f - *“As [a man] thinks within himself, so he is...”*

Every act of man, however good or bad, begins with a single thought.

#### 1. It All Started with an Idea

A single thought can change your life dramatically if it is dwelt upon, developed and translated into action. Indeed, every modern convenience we have now began with an idea in the mind of the inventor. Equally, every facet of your character and action of your life started as a single thought.

-The first sight of the man’s future wife triggered a thought pattern which resulted in his asking for a date and their ultimate marriage.

-The first time the convict considered how easy it would be to shoplift, he triggered a thought pattern which resulted in his stealing and eventual imprisonment.

-The idea of man being able to fly triggered a sequence of events that resulted in the development of the airplane.

-The child’s first encounter with a barking dog set off a thought pattern which resulted in a deep-seated fear of being attacked by one.

This principle can work either positively for our good or negatively for our harm.

##### a. Positive

Mathew 9:20-22 – *“And behold, a woman who had suffered from a discharge of blood for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his garment, for she said to herself, ‘If I only touch his garment, I will be made well.’ Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, ‘Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well.’ And instantly the woman was made well.”*

What motivated this sick woman to push through the crowd to reach Jesus? A single thought: ‘If only I touch his cloak, I will be healed.’ She had no doubt heard about and perhaps even seen others healed by Jesus. This rekindled the dying hope that she would one day be well again. She had to touch him. If only she could, she

knew she would be healed. This thought, which had now become a confidence of faith, gripped and motivated her as she pushed through the crowd. Nothing would stop her – and she received according to her faith.

A single thought, based on the truth of God’s desire to heal the sick, triggered the whole sequence of events leading to its realization.

b. Negative

2 Samuel 11:2-4 – *“It happened, late one afternoon, when David arose from his couch and was walking on the roof of the king's house, that he saw from the roof a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful. And David sent and inquired about the woman. And one said, ‘Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?’ So David sent messengers and took her, and she came to him, and he lay with her. (Now she had been purifying herself from her uncleanness.) Then she returned to her house.*

Note the sequence of events which took place here:

1. He Saw

What he saw- probably quite innocently and by accident – entered his mind and started a chain reaction which he could have stopped at any time.

2. He considered

He considered what he saw, pondered the woman’s beauty and allowed his mind to dwell on her until what had been an accidental glance became lustful thoughts.

3. He enquired

His thoughts resulted in an enquiry into who she was as his train of thought rolled on unchecked.

4. He entertained her

His request to meet her now had only one purpose behind it – to satisfy the lust triggered by that initial thought.

David’s thought became an act. The way he had thought within himself was the way he had become. A lustful thought became an act of adultery.

**2. You Are in Charge**

The sad truth is that the sequence could have been stopped at any point if David had so desired. He was the master of his own thoughts as are we of ours.

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...”*

Recognizing this truth should cause us as responsible Christians to take control of our thought lives. A sinful thought that is not dealt with can result in a sinful action. On the other hand, a righteous thought that is entertained will produce righteous actions:

Romans 8:5 – *“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.”*

This scripture describes how the nature of your life – expressed in actions, speech and attitudes – is a consequence of where your mind is ‘set’. The fixing of your mind on a matter is an issue of personal choice. You decide about whether or not to entertain in your mind that which you know to be sinful. You have the final say as to what you fill your mind with.

Colossians 3:2 – *“Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.”*

### **3. Your Mind and Your Salvation**

Does this then mean that, by a thought process, I can bring myself into God’s favor and so obtain salvation? No! The principle of fixing your mind on something works for everyone, whether they are inside or outside of Christ. As Christians we recognize the importance of fixing our mind on Christ and seek to develop into the fullness of God’s purpose for us through it.

#### **a. A spiritual experience**

Our new birth is primarily a spiritual issue. In order to be born again we must go beyond just reason and submit to God’s Word and the operation of simple faith. Nicodemus in his encounter with Jesus was confronted with this dilemma:

John 3:3-6 – *“Jesus answered him, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.’ Nicodemus said to him, ‘How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?’ Jesus answered, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.”*

Nicodemus had to come to a place of seeing that salvation was not a matter of simply doing right or thinking right – but of receiving by faith the gift of eternal life that God offers:

Ephesians 2:8 – *“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God...”*

#### **b. A complete transformation**

Our salvation, though a spiritual encounter initially, deals with the whole of our being – body, soul and spirit. The work of the Holy Spirit permeates every department of our lives:

2 Corinthians 5:17 – *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”*

The process of change which takes place in our life after coming to Christ (known as sanctification) affects every part of us. It is a process of change towards a very specific goal:

2 Corinthians 3:18 – *“And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.”*

c. Co-operating with Christ

Our salvation was initiated by God’s grace and we received our new birth as a free gift, knowing that there was nothing we could do to merit or earn it. Our Christian experience, however, is not passive or beyond our control. We have a responsible part to play.

We are by nature creatures of free will and choice. As a Christian I can choose to disobey God or to follow him wholeheartedly. While God works in me, my responsibility is to outwork in the practical areas of my life His purpose and will for me:

Philippians 2:12-13 – *“Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.”*

A major part of ‘working out’ what God has done in me begins by thinking correctly. The way we think as Christians and what we let our minds dwell upon has a great bearing on our spiritual growth and stability.

#### **4. Get Out of the Mold**

Our responsibility to think right as we work out what God has put in us is seen in the following scripture:

Romans 12:2 – *“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”*

Because we live in the society in which we do, our minds have become conditioned to its way of thinking. This inevitably works against God’s purpose for us. If we continue to think according to the pattern of this world we become like all the other people in the world: ‘Without hope and without God in the world’ (Ephesians 2:12).

We can change. We can break out of this world’s mold. We can be transformed into people who know and do God’s will and represent Christ, by the renewing of our minds.

#### **5. Renewing Your Mind**

Our purpose is to become like Christ; we must therefore think the way Christ thinks. This involves a deliberate act of our will on two counts. First, we need to decide not to ‘conform any longer to the pattern of this world’ (Romans 12:2). This is the mental choice, the introduction of a new way of thinking; then follows a decision to act in line with this new way of thinking. We deliberately decide not to do the things which characterized the life we once lived in the world before we came to Christ. We need to say: ‘I won’t conform to the pattern of this world – I’m going to think God’s thoughts and consequently live God’s way:

Colossians 3:2-3, 5-20 – *“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...Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is*

*coming. In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all. Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them. Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord."*

As we set our minds to think God's way we will also be able live in a manner that reflects Christ, live as the righteous people we are in Christ:

*Romans 6:11-13 – "So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness."*

Counting or reckoning ourselves dead to sin is an issue to do with the mind. Consider, think, ponder, and meditate upon the fact that in Christ you are dead to sin and its power. Thinking this way equips you to resist temptation so that you 'do not let sin reign in your mortal body'. Neither will you have a desire to offer 'parts of your body to sin'.

Think God's thoughts and you will live God's way more effectively. Think like Christ; and with faith, become like Christ.

## **6. Feed Your Mind**

God's mind and will are revealed in his Word, the Bible. His word speaks into the important issues of life. As you fill your mind full of that Word, in each situation you encounter you will see through God's eyes and react to it as he would. Knowing God's Word will change your life, not in the sense of a learning exercise, but by knowing it in your mind and heart – then putting it into practice:

*James 1:22 – "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves."*

One function of the Holy Spirit is to remind us of God's Word and his ways as we find ourselves in the many and varied situations of life:

*John 14:26 – "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you."*

We can only be reminded of what we have once heard or known. It is our responsibility to feed our minds with God's Word so that the Spirit has a resource to work with as he guides us 'Into all truth' (John 16:13).

## **7. Think it – Become it**

You will change as you start to think in line with God's Word. You will:

- a. Know God's will

Romans 12:2 – *“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”*

- b. Live free from sin

Psalms 119:9, 11 – *“How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word...I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.”*

- c. Be thoroughly equipped

2 Timothy 3:16-17 – *“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.”*

### **Conclusion:**

Proverbs 23:7f - *“As [a man] thinks within himself, so he is...”*

How you are today has been heavily influenced by how you have thought up to this point in time. What you feel and experience now has been conditioned by what you have let your mind dwell upon, even today.

This sort of person you will be in the future depends on how you think from this point onwards. Make a conscious decision to work with God by filling your mind with his thoughts so that it can be your boast that:

1 John 4:17 – *“By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world.”*