

A MAN IS WHAT HE THINKS

"For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he." Proverbs 23:7.

The capacity of thinking is a most wonderful thing. Here lies man's supremacy over all the visible world about him. All the mighty deeds that have blessed humanity were once thoughts. All of the glorious undertakings and enterprises of men were once only thoughts.

The bee is a honey-making creature; it roams over many fields, gathers its harvest from many flowers, comes back laden with honey and wax, and stores them for future use when winter comes. As the honey the bee makes, so is he. The spider is a web-making creature; out of his own substance he weaves a web in the corner for the capture of food. And that web is the spider's only hope of future sustenance. Man is a thinking creature; that is his constitutional function. He eats, drinks, laughs, and weeps, but the underlying fiber and fabric of what he is, and is to be, is thought. As the bee must live on the honey he stored up, as the spider must live well or ill as a result of the quality of the web he wove for himself, so man must bear the character which he wove for himself on the loom of thought. This character which we weave out of thoughts is immortal. It is not only a part of us, it is essentially us. "As he thinketh in his heart, so is he."

That statement is true and cannot be evaded. It means that the inner world of our thinking becomes the outer world of act and fact. There is nothing, whether good or evil, true or false, that was not, first of all, a conception in the mind. God thought, and out of chaos came creation. God thought, and the sun, moon and stars performed according to His will. God thought, and a human being came into existence. God thought, and the World was made flesh and dwelt among us. God thought, and a cross was lifted high on the horizon of time.

Emerson wrote the statement, "The key to every man is his thought." It is not amiss to say, "Let me know a man's thoughts and I can tell you where he belongs in life." The expression on the face, the words upon the lips and the works of our hands are but the indications of what we are thinking. Today a thought, tomorrow a building; today a thought, tomorrow a machine; today a thought, tomorrow an advance in civilization. So it goes. Thought is the seed from which the affairs of life spring.

I. The Wender Of Thinking.

Thinking is the most valuable trait with which we are endowed. The man who has lost his mental processes is an object of profound pity. The Creator endowed man with thinking ability and He expects him to use his mind aright. All of our God-given endowments should be used for His glory and not for selfish ends. And yet the sins of the human mind are often far worse than the sins of the flesh.

I. The Worth of Thinking.

It is worthwhile to think. Suppose men never thought, but acted thoughtlessly. That happens frequently and we know something of the sad consequences. Most church difficulties arise through thoughtlessness on the part of the members. Thinking finds its worth in that with which it is occupied. What engages your thought? That is the test question. The mental machinery should be in good working order. However, the material which goes into the loom of thought determines the quality and usefulness of the finished product.

III. The Work Of Thinking.

Unless we work at this business of thinking our minds become idle, and an idle mind is Satan's workshop where all manner of evil may be hatched. "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things" (Philippians 4:8). This means that we are to meditate upon them, set value to them and invest in them. Here is the material out of which the mental tapestry may be woven. Thinking on this high plane requires work.

There is only one way to conquer wrong thinking and that is by driving out the evil thoughts by means of good ones. Martin Luther said, "You cannot prevent a bird from lighting upon your head, but you can prevent it from building a nest in your hair." We may not be able to prevent evil thoughts from popping into our minds, but we can keep from dwelling upon them. Never get away from the truth that spiritual thinking leads to abundant living.

Your philosophy of life is the foundation on which you build your life structure. One cannot erect a great and durable building without a solid foundation, or build a noble life without the right philosophy. The true philosophy of life is found in the Bible. It tells us where we came from, why we are here, where we are going and how to get there. It also tells us how to live in a great way. It informs us that our lives have eternal significance, meaning, and purpose. That kind of philosophy exalts and glorifies the humblest life. The only way in which a person can get the true philosophy of life and make it workable is to have the life related properly to Christ. Our Lord has given us His worthwhile objective in living in the words, "I came not to be ministered unto, but to minister."

In reality a man is what his thinking is. His thoughts are the artists that shape and color his days. As his thoughts are, so his life will be, happy or sad. You cannot know a man merely by listening to his words or watching his actions. There is always more in man than comes into expression. You do not know a man until you know his thoughts. God knows a man perfectly because He knows his thoughts. God judges a man as much by what he thinks as by what he does in his life.

Every man has a train of thought on which he rides when he is alone. The worth and happiness of his life to himself, and its usefulness to others, depends on the direction in which that train is going, the baggage it carries, and the country through which it travels.

It is the inner habit of mind, its secret bias, which determines what the life of man is to be, whether he stumbles through his days to defeat, or strikes his stride and walks erect, free, and unafraid. Either he will live by faith or by doubt, by courage or fear, by hope or despair.

Any person or any influence which reaches and alters our inner attitude of mind puts our train of thought on the right track, loads it with precious truth and starts it toward the city of God, has rendered us the highest service which we can know upon this earth.

The greatest threat to man lies within himself. The tragedy of his life today lies in wrong thinking, in crippling inner conflicts, and in confused emotions. In short, he lacks mental health and emotional maturity and stability, and he lacks a compulsive passion to lift him out of his inner jungle.

In fact, man cannot use his highly developed intellect effectively because of his neurotic fears, his absurd prejudices, his mad fanaticisms, his unreasoning hates, and his equally unreasoning devotions, which tear him to pieces and leave his life littered and in disarray.

It is as man thinks in his heart that tells the story. Out of the heart are the issues of life. Emotion is the steam which drives the engine, and a wild, untamed emotion can drive us to madness and wreck. Here is the key to life which we must find and use. If you want your life to be worthwhile, you must begin and train yourself, building up better habits of thought selection and emotional mastery. By the grace of God and through obedience to Him you can remake your life.

In the world today, so full of fears, so distorted in its thinking, so violent, so infectious in its sick emotions, one may easily drift or drop into ways of living that poison life. We are careful about germs that infect the body, but careless about ideas that ruin the mind.

"God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind," but He cannot give it unless we take it, make ready for it, and prove ourselves worthy of the gift.

The character of your action is determined by your thoughts. Your religion cannot be right if your thinking is wrong. Perhaps you have heard somebody say, "Let a man think anything he pleases, so long as he behaves decently. It does not matter what a man thinks, it is what he does that counts." What nonsense! Nothing could be more untrue. Christ considers it infinitely more important that a man think right than that he blindly conform to the ways and the customs of society. There is always hope for a man if you can get him to think right. If a man thinks right, he will act right.

What is it that makes one man selfish and indifferent to the welfare of others, while another is thoughtful, generous and kind? It is the difference in their thinking that causes the difference in their attitude and behavior toward others. Criminal thinking causes one to become a criminal. Unkind thoughts cause one to be unkind. Selfish thinking results in selfish living. "For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he."

In giving a list of the four things that a man must do to keep his record true, Henry van Dyke put right thinking first. Margaret Sangster repeatedly said, "That which a man thinks about, talks about, and loves, he ultimately becomes." It is our highest duty to think about the highest, noblest and purest things. If our thoughts make us what we are, then the secret of a beautiful life is to think sweet, happy, beautiful, and holy thoughts. God and His peace do not come into the mind that is filled with evil thoughts. It is better to have an unbathed body than a filthy, unclean mind. Since God has given us great, beautiful and holy things to think about and live for, it is exceedingly foolish to waste our time thinking about things that are low, trashy, and mean. If one is unclean in thought, word or deed, he makes it more difficult for others to live clean, worthy and useful lives. Keep your thought life pure and clean for the sake of others, as well as for your own sake.

A man is as his thoughts. He has control over his thoughts. God helps him in the exercise of that control. We can direct ourselves away from the evil and towards the good. Yield your thoughts to Christ and He will direct you to say the right words and to do the right deeds.