

# THE ROLE OF THINKING IN BIBLICAL COUNSELING

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*As a man thinks in his heart, so is he (Proverbs 23:7).* This verse from the Old Testament writings of Solomon, has been used as the basis of success philosophy by gurus in seminars, books, media, and so forth. When Sir Francis Bacon was asked what he thought was the outlook for the next generation, he replied, "Tell me what the young are thinking, and I will tell you." Marcus Aurelius said, "A man's life is what his thoughts make him."

Emerson wrote, "The ancestor of every action is a thought." Even old William Shakespeare got into the act: "There is nothing, either good or bad, but thinking makes it so." God said through His prophet Jeremiah, *I will give you the fruit of your thoughts" (Jeremiah 6:19).*

Biblical counseling is powerful because it addresses what God says is the source of man's problems and sin: HIS THOUGHTS: *And he said, 'what comes out of a man, that defiles a man. For from within, out of the heart of man, PROCEED EVIL THOUGHTS, adulteries, fornication, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, and evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from WITHIN and defile a man' (Mark 7:21-23).*

This list of 12 major crimes and sins committed by mankind, is the continual debate over "Why do people do these things?" The answers are as varied and many as those involved in answering. Some popular reasons by persons committing these 12, and other sins, are as follows:

1. People do what they do because of their parents.
2. People do what they do because of their teachers.
3. People do what they do because of their "inner child."
4. People grew up in a poor neighborhood or poverty.
5. People were influenced by their peers.
6. People were victims of the media.
7. People do what they do because of disease or mental illness.

The reasons are almost endless, as counselors, social workers, medical professionals, etc. Try to give reasons for man's sinful behavior. They will call it anything but sin or sinful thinking. I believe Jesus. He said there is never just one sin or crime committed; behind each sin and crime

a thought has gone before. Therefore, to make a valid and lasting change in behavior one must change his or her thinking. The Bible calls this *repentance*: “To have another mind, to change one’s mind.” It is possible for one to adjust or change his external behavior without changing his mind or thinking. Jesus said a man may refrain from the overt practice of adultery, but he can *still lust after her and commit adultery in his heart.*”

In the parable about washing the outside of cups and bowls, which represents pruning the externals, Jesus said it is imperative *to clean the inside too*. We can paint over rust with expensive and beautiful paint, but in time it will resurface. Likewise, we can clean up our outward act, but still be participating in it in our hearts (thinking). *Some men’s sins are open going before into the judgment, and some men’s sins do follow them*. The Kingdom of God is like a giant net in which many are gathered, but then there is a separating and throwing back those which aren’t desirable. Read Matthew 7:21-23.

#### **CONFESSION OF A TERRORIST**

His name struck fear in the heart of the early Christians. He was on an obsessive mission to stamp out every residue of the new sect called Christian. It was an enemy of God and the Law of Moses. His name was Saul, and he hailed from Tarsus. Here, before King Agrippa, is a short confession and a list of his crimes and terrorist acts against the first century church: *Why should it be THOUGHT incredible by you that God raises the dead? Indeed, I myself THOUGHT I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. This I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted them even in foreign cities (Acts 26:8-11).*

After his confession before Agrippa, Paul went on to discuss how he changed his mind and thinking about Christ and the Gospel (Acts 26:12-32). He repented and spent the rest of his life, bringing forth fruits documenting his change of mind (thinking). He wrote to the Christians in Rome: *And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God (Romans*

12:2). To the Colossians he admonished them *to set their minds on things above (Colossians 3:2)*.

### **BIBLICAL EMPHASIS ON THOUGHT**

We shouldn't be surprised to find numerous passages in the God's counseling manual—the Holy Bible—on the power and importance of thoughts and thinking. In the secular world the emphasis on thinking is called “cognitive therapy.” Our thinking is so important that God monitors them at all times: *O Lord, You have searched me and know me. You know my sitting down and my rising up; you understand my THOUGHTS afar off. You comprehend my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word on my tongue, but behold, O Lord, You know it altogether (Psalm 139:1-3)*.

Let's notice the following verses in the Bible and what they reveal about the place and importance of our thoughts:

1. **Obedience to God takes place in the mind:** *Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every THOUGHT to the obedience of Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5)*.
2. **The imagination is controlled by thoughts:** *And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the THOUGHTS of his heart was only evil continually (Genesis 6:5)*.
3. **Thoughts bring disapproval from God:** *The THOUGHTS of the wicked are an abomination to the Lord: but the words of the pure are pleasant words (Proverbs 15:26)*.
4. **Fruit in our lives is produced by our thoughts:** *Hear, O earth: behold, I will bring evil upon this people, even the fruit of their THOUGHTS, because they have not hearkened unto My words, nor to My Law, but rejected it (Jeremiah 6:19)*.
5. **You may curse a person in your thoughts:** *Curse not the king, no not in THOUGHT: and curse not the rich in your bed-chamber (Ecclesiastes 10:20)*.
6. **The first step in turning from God occurs in thoughts:** *Every day they wrest my word: all their thoughts are evil against Me (Psalm 56:5; cf. Psalm 14:1)*.

7. **If you think right you are right:** *The THOUGHTS of the righteous are right, but counsels of the wicked are deceit (Proverbs 12:5).*
8. **The sin of foolishness begins with thoughts:** *The THOUGHT of the foolish is sin; and the scorner is an abomination to men (Proverbs 24:9).*
9. **Wickedness toward others starts with thoughts:** *Beware that there be not a THOUGHT in the wicked heart, saying,...and thine eye be evil against thy poor brother, that you give him nothing (Deuteronomy 15:9).*
10. **Hypocrisy begins in the thoughts:** *Even so you outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within you are full of hypocrisy and iniquity (Matthew 23:29).*
11. **Man's tendency is not to think like God thinks:** *For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the Lord (Isaiah 55:8).*
12. **We must invite God to examine our thoughts:** *Search me, O lord, and know my heart: try me, and know my THOUGHTS (Psalm 139:23).*
13. **Our thinking helps us turn to God:** *I THOUGHT on my ways, and turned my feet into Your testimonies (Psalm 119:59). The word REPENT means to "have a change of mind (Luke 13:3, 5).*
14. **Comfort comes from thinking biblically:** *In the multitude of my THOUGHTS within me thy comforts delight my soul. God comforts through His word (Romans 15:4; 2 Corinthians 1:3).*
15. **If you desire to be a "deep thinker"—think biblically:** *O Lord, how great are thy works! And thy THOUGHTS are very deep (Psalm 92:5).*
16. **It is precious to think biblically:** *How precious are your THOUGHTS unto me, O God! How great is the sum of them! (Psalm 139:17).*
17. **Thoughts determine how we think about God and man:** *These things have you done, and I kept silence: you thought that I was altogether such a one as thyself; but I will reprove you, and set them in order before My eyes (Psalm 50:21).*
18. **Remembering or forgetting God occurs in man's thoughts:** *Now consider this, you that forget God... (Psalm 50:2) ... but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened (Psalm 1:21).*

19. **No thought can be hidden or withheld from God:** *I know that You can do everything, and that no THOUGHT can be withheld from You (Job 42:2).*

20. **Thinking causes a person to do wrong:** *I verily THOUGHT with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth (Acts 26:9). Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray to God, if perhaps the THOUGHT of thine heart may be forgiven you (Acts 8:22).*

One of the major goals of biblical counseling is to help a person understand the role thinking and thoughts play in attitudes, behaviors, and belief system. Thoughts help us develop habits that in turn drive our behavior automatically. In order to change attitudes and behavior patterns there must be a change in thinking. This is the core discipline of *bringing every thought captive to Christ*. If Christ approves the thought we can obey it, if he doesn't, we must not allow it to influence our lives. We must continually set our minds on things above (Colossians 3:2), and think God's agenda (Philippians 4:8-10).

In biblical counseling the thinking of the counselee is identified, along with the syntax that led to the thinking. Once this is known a plan for replacement thinking can be put in place and followed. ***What's on your mind?***

#### **APPLICATION EXERCISE**

1. Why does thinking play such an important role in biblical counseling?
2. Why is negative thinking so dangerous?
3. How can a person change his/her thinking, and thus changed behavior.
4. How does "automatic thoughts" relate to biblical means of changing thought patterns?
5. How do you practice biblical thinking?
6. What additional observations do you have?