

"THE BIGGEST OF ALL BATTLEFIELDS"

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever stopped to consider how powerful and how influential our inner thoughts are? When all is said and done, what is it that determines our character? Is it not the activity that goes on in our minds? Within us lie the forces that make us or mar us. What we are in our inner life decides how we react to a given situation. It decides whether we fall under a temptation or overcome it. It decides how we meet adversity or prosperity. It was Jesus, remember, who said: "As a man thinks in his heart, so he is." I'm sure that our Lord would have approved of this sentiment of Marcus Aurelius: "The soul is dyed the color of its thoughts". There is an old proverb that comes to mind: "Sow a thought and you reap an act; sow an act and you reap a habit; sow a habit and you reap a character; sow a character and you reap a destiny".

MASTERING OUR THOUGHTS

Therefore, if we value the things of the spirit, the things that matter the most, we shall seek with divine help to discipline and master our thoughts. And this is not always the easiest thing for us to do. To regulate our actions is not easy, yet social pressure is brought to bear upon our actions. To guard our speech and control our wagging tongues is not easy, yet speech is controlled and checked by a variety of inhibiting influences. Action and speech bring us into association with our fellow human beings, and at once our prudence, our concern for our own reputations, admonish us to proceed with caution and restraint. However, thought is free from all external influences and restraints. It is carried on in a world where nobody observes it. A man may revel in all sorts of mental obscenity and the law cannot lay a finger on him unless and until his thoughts become acts. You see all of the safeguards which control our speech, all of the deterrent motives which surround our deeds, are absent when we enter the silent halls of thought. And it is this secrecy, this freedom from restraint that makes the discipline of thought so difficult.

JESUS TAUGHT THAT THOUGHT MUST BE MASTERED....

Jesus taught, of course, that thought must be mastered. Notice in connection with this the inwardness of his moral teaching. From within, he said, out of the heart of a man proceeds all that can exalt or defile him. He taught that the commandments are broken in thought before the sinner proceeds to overt acts, and the sin remains even if no open offense is committed. This is an approach which links His method of treatment with those of modern medical science. He always attacked the disease, not the symptoms. For instance, he rebuked acquisitiveness rather than wealth, lust rather than adultery, hatred rather than violence. For him the evil mind was as wrong as the evil deed. He understood human nature so well. He knew people who were outwardly respectable and circumspect but in whose minds greed, lust, hatred, jealousy, passion rioted unchecked. Somehow these people managed to remain within the bounds of conventional morality yet they were not averse now and then to imagining immoralities and they permitted themselves a license in thought they dared not, for reputation's sake, to permit in speech and action. Remember his withering words: "Woe to you, hypocrites, for you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within they are full of deadmen's bones and all uncleanness."

CHANGED . . .
HUMAN NATURE HAS NOT

THE BIGGEST OF ALL BATTLEFIELDS

I would venture to say that for all of us, the biggest battlefield

of all is the one inside of us. This fight for character is not carried on in public, but in private....within ourselves. I think too that most of us are not sensitive enough to the destructive nature of the negative thoughts that we carry around with us. We take too lightly the petty animosities, the little jealousies harbored in our minds. An illustration here might help. In London at the time of the Blitz, some children were playing with a live shell. They thought it was harmless and for a time nothing happened. And then one day the detonator was touched on the sensitive point and the shell exploded and eight small children were killed. So temper explodes and the happiness of a home is wrecked, or friendships are strained. Feelings of dislike and prejudice take hold and friction and strife are the inevitable result. What I want you to see this morning is this: the life of thought as well as the life of action has to be moralized, disciplined and Christianized.

curbed

PAUL'S ADVICE

It is because thought is so powerful that the Apostle Paul wrote this memorable passage:

"Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise.....think about these things!"

His advice is psychologically sound. In other words, you are to accentuate what is positive and eliminate what is negative. It is to refuse to give room in your mind to all of the thoughts that come crowding along into our minds. It is to put up, so to speak, a NO ADMITTANCE sign to unkind, unlovely, impure, critical thoughts. As one of the Puritans stated the case: "I cannot help the birds flying over my head, but I can prevent them from building nests in my hair". Paul is spelling out in detail for us the sort of mental activity in which we should engage: "Whatever is true...whatever is honorable...whatever is just....whatever is lovely....whatever is gracious....think on these things." You may even wish to make the prayer of Socrates, your prayer: "I pray, O God, that I may be beautiful within"

Teach yourselves to love the highest when you see it. Nourish your belief in greatness and goodness, in heroic courage and warm generosity. Develop those humble virtues that we tend to overlook perhaps consider to be out of place in today's world: a patience that never wearies....a fidelity that never betrays....a readiness to forgive....a willingness to listen to both sides.....a persistence that can solve many a problem....a tenderness in dealing with both young and old alike. Make it a fixed principle - a daily habit to contemplate the best. Do it in the case of your reading. Why devote yourself to the literature of degeneracy when the literature of the best is close at hand. Why spend time watching violence on television when others things are close at hand that elevate and uplift. Be discriminating. When you go to the theater, don't buy tickets for a show just because it's a hit and crowds are flocking to it. Have standards....Christian standards. Live with the best. Acquire a sense of it and a love for it.

SIGNALS OF THE DISPOSITION

HAVE THE MIND OF CHRIST

In all of this I think of another of Paul's great utterances: "We have this mind of Christ". How did Paul come to the place where he could say without pretense or exaggeration - "we have this mind of Christ". My friends - it was because of his attachment to Christ, his dedication of himself and all of his powers to Christ, his identification of himself with Christ's will and purpose.

It was the practice of Thomas Carlyle to place before him, in full view, a photograph of the person on whose biography he was working. In this way, the character became a living, breathing reality to him and the inspirations were kindled that would otherwise have been unknown. I say this to you: if you would give your mind the highest inspiration keep Christ before you. Think of him daily. Set yourself to a lifelong study of his words and ways. Make the guiding principle He enunciated the guide lines of your life. Keep your New Testament within your arms reach. And pray - pray that His spirit may be part of your spirit. Follow and serve him humbly and wholeheartedly. Dedication to Christ is the secret of Christmindedness. And when you say as Paul did - "We have this mind of Christ" - you will think almost spontaneously of "Whatever is true...honorable...just....pure...lovely....and gracious..."

LET US PRAY: God Our Father....we thank thee for the blessings that have richly filled our lives - homes to share, loved ones to live with, friends to cherish, a place to fill, work to do, causes to serve. Above all we thank thee for Jesus Christ - his simplicity, his self-discipline, his serenity of spirit, his devotion to thy will and his singleness of purpose in obeying it, his sympathy with human need. In all these ways, give us grace to follow in his steps.

As we come to thy table this hour, may we make confession of our sins and shortcomings unto Thee - acknowledging all that has been unworthy in our lives - unkind words, impure thoughts, selfish and self-centered living, lack of patience with others,.... Pardon us for these our sins. And truly repenting of them may we resolve to have done with them once and for all, and rise to new life, remembering Jesus and how on Easter long ago, he too rose to a new life. In his name we pray. Amen

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INTRODUCTION

Have you ever stopped to consider how powerful and how influential our inner thoughts are? When all is said and done, what is it that determines our character? Is it not the activity that goes on in our minds? Within us lie the forces that make us or mar us. What we are in our inner life decides how we react to a given situation. It decides whether we fall under a temptation or overcome it. It decides how we meet adversity or prosperity. It was Jesus, remember, who said: "As a man thinks in his heart, so he is". I'm sure our Lord would have approved of this sentiment expressed by Marcus Aurelius, "The soul is dyed the color of its thoughts". There is an old proverb that comes to mind: "Sow a thought and you reap an act; sow an act and you reap a habit; sow a habit and you reap a character; sow a character and you reap a destiny".

DEVELOPMENT

Therefore, if we value the things of the spirit, the things that matter the most, we shall seek with divine help to discipline and master our thoughts. And this is not always the most simple thing to do. To regulate our actions is not easy, and yet social pressure is brought to bear upon actions. To guard our wagging tongues and critical speech is not easy, yet speech is restrained and checked by a variety of inhibiting influences. Action and speech bring us into association with our fellow human beings, and at once our prudence, our concern for our own reputations, admonish us to proceed with caution and restraint. Thought, however, is free from all external restraints. It's carried on in a world where nobody observes it. A man may revel in all sorts of mental obscenity and the law cannot lay a finger on him unless and until his thoughts become acts. You see - all the safeguards which control our speech, all the deterrent motives which surround our deeds, are absent when we enter the silent halls of thoughts. And it is this secrecy, this freedom from restraint that makes the discipline of thought so difficult.

Jesus taught that thought must be mastered. Notice in connection with this the inwardness of his moral teaching. From within, he said, out of a heart of a man proceeds all that can exalt him or defile him. It was his teaching that the commandments are broken in thought before the sinner proceeds to overt acts, and the sin remains even if no open offense is committed. This is an approach which links his methods of treatment with those of modern medical science. He always attacks the disease, not the symptoms. For instance, he rebukes acquisitiveness rather than wealth, lust rather than adultery, hatred rather than violence. For him the evil mind was just as much to be condemned as the evil act. He understood human nature so very well. He knew people who were outwardly respectable and circumspect, but in whose minds greed, selfishness, jealousy, and passion rioted unchecked. They managed to keep within the bounds of conventional morality yet they were not averse now and again to imagining immoralities and they permitted themselves a license in thought they dared not, for reputation's sake, to permit in speech and action. Remember his withering words to some of these people: "Woe to you, hypocrites, for you are like white washed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness."

THE BIGGEST OF ALL BATTLEFIELDS

For all of us then, the biggest of all battlefields is within.

~~This fight for character is not public, but secret. Our Lord traced every broken commandment - murder, infidelity to the marriage vow, an ignoble life - to wrong thought. Modern psychology with its stress on mental images and their influence on character teaches the same thing.~~ I think that most of us are not sensitive enough to the destructive nature of the negative thoughts that we carry around with us. We take too lightly the animosities, the jealousies harbored in our minds. In London at the time of the blitz, some children were playing with a live shell. They thought it was harmless and for a time nothing happened. Then the detonator was touched on the sensitive point and the shell exploded. So temper explodes and the happiness of a home is wrecked. Selfishness becomes ingrained and the finer issues of life are lost sight of. Feelings of dislike and prejudice take hold and friction and strife are the inevitable result. What I want you to see this morning is this: the life of thought as well as the life of action has to be moralized and Christianized.

True and accurate

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His advice is sound. The psychology of this is trustworthy. In other words, you are to accentuate what is positive and eliminate what is negative. It is to refuse to give room in your mind to all of the thoughts that come crowding into your life. It is to put up, so to speak, a NO ADMITTANCE sign to unkind, unlovely, impure, critical thoughts. As one of the Puritans quaintly stated the case: "I cannot help the birds flying over my head, but I can prevent them from building nests in my hair." Paul is spelling out in wide detail the sort of mental activity in which you and I should engage. "Whatever is true.....whatever is honorable.....whatever is just.....whatever is lovely.....whatever is gracious.....think on these things." You may even wish to make the prayer of Socrates, your prayer: "I pray, O God, that I may be beautiful within".

Teach yourself to love the highest when you see it. And nourish your belief in greatness and goodness, in heroic courage and warm generosity. Develop those humble virtues that we tend to overlook in our lives - a patience that never wearies, a fidelity that never betrays, a readiness to forgive, a gentleness and a tenderness both to the young and the old. Make it a fixed principle, a daily habit to contemplate the best. Do it in the case of your reading. Why devote yourself to the literature of degeneracy when the literature of the classics is at your command. Why spend time watching television shows that are just so typical of the lower side of life when there are things that elevate and uplift available to you. Be discriminating. When you go to the theater, don't just buy tickets for a show just because it is a hit and the crowds are flocking to it. Have standards, Christian standards. Live with what is best and first rate. Acquire a sense of it, a love for it. And if you are a parent or a teacher, inspire the young folks in your charge to do the same.

a willing to hear a sermon

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In all of this I think of another of Paul's great utterances - "We have this mind of Christ". How did Paul come to the place where without pretense or exaggeration He could say a thing like that? It was because of his attachment to Christ, his dedication of himself and of all of his powers to Christ, his identification of himself with Christ's will and purpose.

I'm reminded of something that Thomas Carlyle use to do. It was his practice to place before him, in full view, a photograph of the subject on whose biography he was working. In this way the character became a living, breathing reality to him and the inspirations were kindled that would otherwise have been unknown. I would say this to you. If you would give your mind the highest inspiration keep Christ before you. Think of him daily. Set yourself to a lifelong study of his words and ways. Make the guiding principles He enunciated the guide lines of your life. Keep your New Testament within your arms reach. Pray that His spirit may indwell and empower you. Follow and serve him humbly and wholeheartedly. Dedication to Christ is the secret of Christmindedness. And when you say as Paul did - "We have this mind of Christ" - you will spontaneously think of "Whatever is true...honorable....just....pure,..lovely.....and gracious...."

LET US PRAY: Our God and Father, we thank Thee for the blessings with which Thou hast richly filled our lives - homes to share, kindred to love, friends to cherish; a place to fill, work to do, causes to serve. Above all we give Thee thanks for Jesus Christ, for the remembrance amid the tasks and duties of each day of the life He lived on earth; his simplicity, his self-discipline, his serenity of spirit, his devotion to thy will and singleness of purpose in obeying it, his sympathy with human need. In all these ways, give us grace to follow in His steps.

We make confession of our sins unto Thee - acknowledging all that has been unworthy in our lives - unkind words, want of patience, forgetfulness of the interest of others, self-centred living. Pardon us for these and all our sins. Truly repenting of them may we resolve to have done with them, and rise on stepping stones of our dead selves to higher and finer things. In the spirit of Christ we pray. Amen

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I. INTRODUCTION

- A. Have you.....to consider how POWERFUL..INFLUENTIAL our inner thoughts are?
1. When all...what is it that determines....
Is it not the ACTIVITY that goes on in....
 2. Within us lie the forces - make us or mar...
What we are....decides how we react....
It decides whether we fall
It decides how we meet adversity...
 3. It was Jesus who said: "As a man thinks in his heart, so he is...."
Agreed with Marcus Aurelius: "The soul is dyed the color of its thoughts...."
An old proverb comes to mind: "Sow a thought.. you reap an act...."

II. DEVELOPMENT

- A. Therefore - if we value the things of the spirit.... the things that matter most....we shall seek with divine help to DISCIPLINE and MASTER our thoughts.
1. Not always easy...
 2. To regulate our actions is not easy, yet....
social pressure...
 3. To regulate our wagging tongues....yet speech is restrained....
Action and speech....
 4. Thought, however, is free from all external restraints...carried on in a world where nobody observes it....
a. A man may revel....and the law....
 5. You see - all the safeguards which control our speech...all the deterrent motives which surround our deeds are absent when we enter...
And it is this secrecy...freedom from restraint ..

III. Jesus taught that thought must be mastered!

- A. Thought must be mastered.....Notice in connection.. INWARDNESS of his moral teaching.
1. From within, he said, out of a heart of a man proceeds all that can exalt him or defile him...It was his teaching that the commandments are broken in thought before the sinner proceeds..
This is an approach....
 2. He always attacks the disease....
For instance -
Rebukes acquisitiveness....wealth
lust..... adultery
hatred... violence.
For him.....the evil mind was
 3. He understood human nature...he knew people who were outwardly respectable and circumspect...
but in whose mind....