

## FINISHING TOUCHES OF CHRISTIAN CHARACTER.

"Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honorable, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, think on these things." – Phil. 4:8.

MANKIND in general does too little thinking, and what it does do is more or less along improper lines, and built upon false bases or premises. Nevertheless, all will agree as respects human welfare, there is a power in thought second to no other power in the universe. Few, perhaps, realize to what extent this is true, – to what extent their own happiness and well-being is dependent upon right thinking, – to what extent whole communities and nations owe their happiness or misery to their right or wrong thinking upon the important problems of life. Words are a power in the world, but only in proportion as they awaken thoughts and lead to actions; words, thoughts, deeds, is the order. Truly did the wise man say, "As a man thinketh in his heart so is he." (Prov. 23:7.) If he thinks justly, he will speak and act justly; if his thoughts are selfish and ignoble, his words will be deceitful and his conduct dishonest.

It is because the power of thought is to a considerable extent recognized that it is appealed to on every hand. The teacher appeals to it; the preacher appeals to it; the politician appeals to it; the financier appeals to it; the sociologist appeals to it; the thousands of pamphlets, books, newspapers and magazines published in every land and in every tongue are all appealing to *thought*. Thought, indeed, may be said to be the great engine which is moving the whole world in its every department. The difficulty is that few are of logical and discerning mind, the fall

having affected every member of the human family has disordered our reasoning faculties; and charlatans and demagogues and self-seekers very frequently take advantage of the weak mental state of humanity to delude with sophistry, and thus to hinder and obscure correct thinking and reasoning. Against the great force and weight of selfishness in its every member does humanity thus labor, as well as against the wiles of Satan; and it is not surprising that generally it is misled and deceived, because added to its incubus of false premises it must struggle also against its own inertia, sluggishness and inaptitude.

The Lord, also appeals to the power of the mind through his Word, and urges upon his people that they be "transformed by the renewing of their *minds*." (Rom. 12:2.) Indeed, it may be said that the cultivation of the power of thought began with God's people, and that so far as religious matters are concerned it has in no particular degree gone from them. While heathen religions seek to restrain the intellect and appeal chiefly to the passions, prejudices and fears, the Lord, to the contrary, calls to his people, saying, "Come, let us reason together." (Isa. 1:18.) We are willing to admit that nominal Christendom has not heeded the Lord's invitation to any great extent – that very largely nominal Christians avoid thought on religious subjects, and especially avoid reasoning; but we hold that to the extent they thus violate the divine arrangement they have not their "senses exercised by reason of use," and are to be esteemed, at very best, only babes in Christ. Heb. 5:13,14.

We are willing to agree also that thinking may be a very dangerous matter in the absence of absolute knowledge upon which to base and exercise our reasoning faculties; but the Lord has protected his faithful along this line by providing us in his Word with the proper basis for reasoning on all subjects involving our duty to our Creator and to our fellow-creatures. The Scriptures lay down certain broad lines, and invite God's

people *to reason within these lines of revelation*, and by reasoning thus to taste and see that the Lord is gracious; and come to a clearer knowledge of him, a better understanding of his character and plan. Many who are awakened to independent [R2890 : page 324] thinking are careless of the *limitations* of the divine revelation, and consequently the influence of the divine Word upon them is a mental liberty and enlightenment which, lacking the divine control, is very apt to go to the extreme of license, selfishness, self conceit and infidelity. Wherever the Bible has gone it has been the torch which has led civilization: millions have profited by its enlightening influence, though only comparatively few walk close to its light and within its prescribed limitations of reason and conduct; and these few are the true Christians – the "wheat" of this age, "the first-fruits unto God of his creatures," which God is now harvesting. – James 1:18.

### **THE CONTROL OF THOUGHT.**

Some are inclined to believe that since man's brain differs from each other man's brain to some extent, therefore his thinking must necessarily be different; in a word, that a man can only think in harmony with his brain construction. But we reply, Not so; each may learn to weigh and balance his own thoughts, to curb some and to encourage others; but to do this each must have before him an ideal of character, to be copied. Thoughts can be controlled just [R2891 : page 324] as words and actions can be controlled: the will is at the helm, and must decide which thoughts and sentiments it will entertain and encourage, and which it will repel. It is necessary, therefore, first of all for the will to be rightly directed, and secondly, to be strong, and to use its power in the control of thought; – in curbing those thoughts which it recognizes as evil, and in stimulating those which it recognizes as good, helpful, beneficial. The will, in Scripture called the "heart," is therefore continually appealed to by the

Lord, as he now seeks amongst men for his "peculiar people." The message is, "My son, give me thine heart" – thy will. This request is not addressed to wilful sinners, for they are not recognized or addressed as sons of God, but as children of the Evil One. Those whom God recognizes as his sons are such as have been brought into harmony with him through forgiveness of sins, by repentance and faith in Christ Jesus, the Redeemer. It is to such that the Lord makes known that if they would "go on to perfection" – to the full attainment of his gracious purposes respecting them, the only proper course would be to give their hearts, their wills, to him in consecration.

The heart, the will, thus given over to God, seeks to know the divine will, to catch the divine thought and to obey it in word and in act; and in proportion as this condition of the new mind is attained, in that same proportion will there begin to be a newness of life in every respect; in ambitions, hopes, sentiments, and efforts. It is for this reason that the revelation of the divine will and plan is furnished to believers – that by growing in the knowledge of it, by thinking on these things, by filling the mind with the divine plan and will, the transforming influence may extend into every avenue of life.

### **OUR TEXT ADDRESSES THE SAINTS.**

A common mistake amongst people would be to address the words of our text on the subject of right thinking to sinners, to evil-doers and evil thinkers; but this is a mistake. The entire Epistle to the Philippians is addressed to "All the *saints* in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi" (1:1); and the exhortation is applicable to all the saints everywhere, but not to others than saints – not to the worldly, not even to the household of faith, until they have made a full consecration of themselves to the Lord. It would be useless to address others along this line; the exhortation would be of no effect. Hence, the exhortation of this

lesson is not specially applicable to any but the most advanced Christians – not even to the "babes in Christ," but only to those who are somewhat matured in the new life. As for the babes who are not developed new creatures, they will have their attention very thoroughly occupied with the cruder elementary lessons, respecting the coarser sins which the new creature must abhor and battle against. This text addresses those who have made considerable progress along these lines of putting away "the filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit" – those who are seeking to *perfect* holiness in their hearts, and so far as possible also in their earthly bodies. – 2 Cor. 7:1.

The context proves our assertion, for after speaking of prayer and thanksgiving to God and the peace of God which passeth all understanding, keeping their hearts and minds, the Apostle sums up this advanced position of grace with the words of our text as the finality or finish of the argument, and of the process of character-development: "Finally, brethren."

### **"WHATSOEVER THINGS ARE TRUE."**

This is the first question to be asked respecting any matter: Is it true or is it false? If it is false the Lord's people are to have nothing whatever to do with it, – no matter how beautiful. Love for the truth lies at the very foundation of saintship, and we remember that the Lord declares through the Apostle that those who will be rejected and stumbled in this harvest time are such as "receive not the truth in the love of it" (2 Thes. 2:10) – such as have pleasure in unrighteousness (untruth). With our poor and at very best imperfect brains there is great danger of our being misled, and hence the Word of the Lord appeals to us with force that we should not even *touch* that which we realize is untrue. This does not mean that we may not weigh and balance evidences to discern the truth from the untruth; but it does mean that as soon as the truth is discovered it will be embraced and

acknowledged, and the untruth as vigorously disavowed and completely withdrawn from. To tamper with error after we see it to be error, to "see how it would reason out, anyway," when we know the matter is on a wrong basis, is to lay a trap for our spiritual feet, one which frequently stumbles travelers on the way to Zion.

If we are following God's admonition through the Apostle, in this text, it will mean an avoidance of fiction, of novels, of unrealities. This, on the other hand, will mean an increased reverence for whatsoever things are true, an increased devotion to them, an increase of time for their study, and an increase of the spirit of truth in our hearts as a result. **[R2891 : page 325]**

### **"WHATSOEVER THINGS ARE HONEST."**

The truth of the thing is only one of the tests to which it must be put. We may find a matter to be true and yet not find it to be worthy of our thought, dishonorable. Who does not know that there are dishonorable and dishonoring thoughts, the pondering of which not only wastes valuable time, but instead of bringing a reward, a blessing for the time spent upon them, entails a loss, a disadvantage, in that it leaves a dishonorable stain in our minds, unworthy of us as new creatures in Christ Jesus?

The true but dishonorable or unworthy things presenting themselves for our consideration at the bar of our minds are perhaps oftenest in connection – with others – the weaknesses, the errors, the follies, or what not of our neighbors, of our friends. The entertaining of these thoughts, the pondering of them, will be unfavorable to us, and the sooner we discern the matter and dismiss them the better, the happier, the more noble will be our own hearts. The dismissal of these unworthy thoughts will leave us the opportunity and the energy, if we will, to expend that much more time upon whatsoever things are not

only true but also honorable, worthy of our attention as new creatures in Christ Jesus.

### **"WHATSOEVER THINGS ARE JUST."**

Here we have another limitation. Our minds are to be occupied in thinking about righteousness or just things, principles, etc.; we are not to be continually meditating upon grievances and injustices, either real or imagined. We are to remember, on the contrary, that we are living in the period which the Scriptures denominate "the present evil world," and that it could not be this if Justice prevailed generally. We are to remember that hereunto we were called, – even to endure injustice, for righteousness' sake; – to do good, to lay down our lives in the service of the Lord and his Word, and yet to be evil-spoken of and to be misunderstood and to have all manner of evil said against us falsely for Christ's sake. We are, therefore, not to think strange of the fiery trials that shall surely come upon all who are of the Royal Priesthood; but rather, having settled this matter in advance, when we made our consecration, we are to take it as it comes, as a matter of course, not grieving over nor specially thinking about the trials, the injustices, etc. And thus doing we will have the more time to give to thinking of the more helpful, the more strengthening, the more elevating things – the things that are just, the things that are in harmony with righteousness, respecting the past, the present and the future, as promised in the Lord's Word.

### **"WHATSOEVER THINGS ARE PURE."**

There is a vast amount of impurity everywhere throughout the world. It, therefore, behoves the Lord's consecrated people to follow the Apostle's injunction, and to carefully strain out the impurities, and see that they do not enter into our hearts, our thoughts, realizing that with them in the result will be to work our defilement, to a greater or less degree. Whoever maintains



purity of thought will have comparatively little effort in maintaining purity of word and of action. Whether the impurity come from one direction or another – from the world or the flesh or the devil – its attack must first of all be upon the mind; and if repelled there the victory is won: if not repelled we cannot know what the consequences would be, as the Apostle James declares: "Lust [selfish desire of any kind], when it has conceived [in the mind] bringeth forth sin [develops sinful words or deeds], and sin when it is finished bringeth forth death." – Jas. 1:15.

No wonder, then, that the Apostle mentions the necessity for our thoughts being guarded along the line of purity, and that if a matter were ever so well established as a truth, and if it involved no injustice, and even were not dishonorable, yet were impure, this would be quite sufficient to condemn it as unworthy of the mind of the Lord's consecrated people. Nor is it to be overlooked that any smut or impurity entering into the mind may cause such a defilement as will give trouble in its complete eradication, not only at the time, but for years afterward.

### **"WHATSOEVER THINGS ARE LOVELY."**

The saints are exhorted to be meek and peacemakers, but in order to be thus they must have amiable thoughts, lovely and lovable thoughts, kind thoughts, gentle thoughts. These in turn will gradually develop into graces of character. We are not to think upon subjects gendering anger, hatred, strife, – vexatious thoughts, quarrelsome thoughts, vindictive and contentious thoughts. These all are to be shunned as enemies to the new creature, and instead we are to think of the beautiful things, the amiable things, we may know respecting our neighbors, our **[R2892 : page 325]** friends; even though we be not able to fully close our eyes against their injustices or evil deeds, we may at least refuse to waste valuable time in thinking about their



weaknesses and thus cultivating unamiable, quarrelsome dispositions in ourselves.

### **"WHATSOEVER THINGS ARE OF GOOD REPORT."**

It may be argued by some that since the world hateth the light and the children of the light, and rejoiceth in iniquity and in getting the advantage over others, therefore those things which would be reputable with it would not be the holy things suitable to the thoughts of God's people. But not so, we answer; the world does recognize to a considerable extent a right standard, even though it does not follow that standard, nor even pretend to do so – even though it hates those who it sees are endeavoring to walk up to that standard; even though it calls the children of light hypocrites, and crucifies them, as in the case of our Lord. It is policy and false religion that generally excite religious persecution. Nevertheless, if anyone will follow the standard that is reputable, and think upon those things he will find therein a blessing.

### **FOR THE VICTORS ARE THE REWARDS.**

Some may feel that if they thus sifted and tested and rejected all the untrue, the unworthy, the unjust, the impure and the unamiable thoughts presenting themselves, that they would have no topic left whereon to engage their minds, and this we believe would be true with a great many – their minds for a time **[R2892 : page 326]** would be quite vacant of thoughts, if all the evil and improper ones were rejected, banished; but by the time they would be in this attitude they would have such a "hunger and thirst after righteousness," truth, things lovely, things pure, things noble, that they would be in the right condition to receive the very spiritual food which the Lord has provided for them. There is one thing, and one thing only, which fully combines all of the above propositions, and demonstrates itself to be the one thing true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, – and that is, the divine

character and plan. Let us think upon its various features. Let us study the divine Word and behold through it, as a telescope, the beauty of the divine character, the splendor of the divine plan, as revealed in God's Word and plan...whose length and breadth and height and depth no man can measure, and only the saints can comprehend by the holy spirit, and that in proportion as they receive of the holy spirit, the holy mind, the holy thoughts, replacing and displacing the unholy thoughts and sentiments of the natural man. (Eph. 3:18.) What a splendid premium the Lord thus places upon the study of his Word in the esteem of all who are of the class addressed by the Apostle in our text!

Such a ruling of the mind is a conquest; such a self-mastery is a victory; the greatest victory that can be gained. As the Scriptures declare, "He that ruleth his spirit [mind] is better than he that taketh a city." (Prov. 16:32.) And the prescription given by the Apostle in our text, for the mental health of the saints, is the very soul-discipline necessary to our development in character, to the degree pleasing to God and acceptable, through Christ Jesus our Lord. These are the victors to whom will be granted a share in the Kingdom. Ah, then, as the Apostle exhorts, "Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin that doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author of our faith" until he shall have become the finisher of it (Heb. 12:1,2); remembering that he who is on our part, and who has engaged to help us and to carry us through every difficulty, and to fully instruct us if we submit ourselves to him, and thus to "make us meet for the inheritance of the saints in light," is Jesus, – who loved us and bought us with his own precious blood.

Well do the Scriptures generally enforce the importance of guarding the mind, the will, the heart, saying, "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life." Keeping it, to the saints now called and in the race, means life more

abundant, with glory, honor and immortality. Neglecting it, refusing to exercise self-control, means the permission of selfish desires to be conceived in our brains, and to lead away from the Lord and his "narrow way" on toward sin, on toward the wages of sin – death – Second Death.

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