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## **RIGHT HABITS OF THOUGHT**

"Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, 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."  
– Phil. 4:8.

AS THE mouthpiece of the Lord, the Apostle Paul is here giving instruction to the Church respecting how she should build herself up. Referring to the great influence of the mind over the body, he lays down certain rules for thinking; for as a man thinketh, so he will become. The more he thinks on good things, the better he will be. The more he thinks on evil things, the more evil he will be. The things we think about, the Apostle says, should be honorable, just, praiseworthy, beautiful. If a thing has none of these qualities the Lord's people should not think on it at all. A wonderful transformation of character is effected by thinking on those things which have wisdom and depth of instruction – those things which come from no one else but God.

### **"WHEN THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH IS COME IT WILL GUIDE YOU INTO ALL TRUTH"**

St. Paul was the one privileged to see the Lord after his ascension. We perceive that he, as well as all the other Apostles, had fulfilled in him the Master's words, "Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in [R4827 : page 165] heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." (Matt. 18:18.) That is to say, the Apostles would be so guided by Divine wisdom that whatever they should declare necessary in life, would be upheld in heaven, and whatsoever they should declare unnecessary, would be so considered in heaven. Hence, the whole duty and responsibility of the Church is outlined by this Apostle. Whatever we see in the Old Testament Scriptures that is valuable to us, we perceive that our Lord through the Apostles has marked out.

Much that our Lord said was spoken in dark sayings. The exposition of some of these sayings and some of these particular instructions he left to the Apostles, under the direction of the Holy Spirit. The reason why Jesus did not give the explanation of the deeper and more spiritual things was that the disciples were not then spirit-begotten and could not understand these things; whereas, after their begetting of the Holy Spirit, they were able to understand the deeper things of the Word of God.

Our Lord said, "When he, the Spirit of Truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth;...and he will show you things to come." (John 16:13.) This he has done through the writings of the Apostles and by believers all through the Gospel Age. Thus the Lord is making ready for the glorious consummation of our hope; and thus the Bride is making herself ready for the marriage of the Lamb, which will shortly take place.

"Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life." (Prov. 4:23.) These are inspired words of the wise king, Solomon, and it was evidently with the same thought in mind that the Apostle penned the words of our text. How beautiful this, the Apostle's final admonition to the Philippian Church, whom he addressed with affection as his "joy and crown"; and how much in keeping with the thought that *out of the heart are the issues of life!*

The heart represents the *will*, the intentions; the will must be kept true and centered in God, for it is the governing power of the whole man. Yet, though the will is the controlling power of man, it is also subject to influences. If the thoughts be impure, unjust, or unholy, the power of the will becomes more and more impaired. Hence the wisdom of the admonition of the Apostle as to what should be the character of our thoughts. In those who are striving to perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord – to adorn themselves with the beauty of holiness – the thoughts must not be neglected and permitted to browse

in every pasture, but must be disciplined to feed upon pure and healthful food, as the Apostle directs.

### **THE TRUTH OF A THING IS BUT ONE OF THE TESTS**

Is this *true*, or is it *false*? is the first question to be asked in the consideration of any matter. Love for the Truth lies at the very foundation of a righteous life, and whoever sympathizes with falsehood or exaggeration is more or less defiling himself; but whoever cleanses his thoughts is to that extent purifying his entire character. With our poor and imperfect brains there is great danger [R4827 : page 166] of our being misled; and hence the Word of God exhorts us earnestly that we should not touch that which we realize is untrue.

The truth of a thing, however, is but one of the tests to which we should subject every matter. Who does not know that there are many things that are true, and yet dishonorable, not worthy of our thoughts. The true, but dishonorable and unworthy things presenting themselves for our consideration are, perhaps, oftenest in connection with the weaknesses, the errors, the follies, or what not of our neighbors, our brethren. The dismissal of these thoughts, so unworthy, will leave us the opportunity and the energy, if we will, to spend upon things that are *honorable* as well as *true*, worthy of our attention as New Creatures in Christ Jesus.

"Things that are *just*." Here we have another limitation. That which is *just* is that which is *right*. Justice and righteousness are synonymous terms. Very often that which is just is supposed to be the same as that which is lovely; as, for instance, The Golden Rule, "Do unto others as you would have others do unto you." This is not the rule of *love*, but of *justice*. We have no right to do unto others anything that we would not that they should do to us. In keeping the Golden Rule, therefore, we are not keeping the great Law of Love, but we are taking a step in the right direction. No one should begin to think about *love* until he is *just*. Love would be something more than

that which is right. Love is more than justice. We have no right to expect more than justice. Whatever we receive more than justice is love, favor.

## **JUSTICE SHOULD BE THE RULE OF OUR LIVES**

In thinking on those things suggested by the Apostle, we should think, first of all, on our own course. We should critically consider whether we are always thinking on these things which are right, just. We should never be prejudiced in the matter. Justice should be the rule of our lives, of our conduct. Again, in thinking on these things, we might naturally think in respect to the conduct of others. We could think about the influence, for instance, of various things. We could allow our minds to dwell much on the injustices practiced about us and elsewhere; on how much injustice is done in Africa against those who could rule themselves better; on how much injustice is done in business, etc. Thus there could be a great deal of muckraking. But this should not be the subject of our general thoughts. We should think of the good things, the higher things, the happier things; not only the good things of this life, but the blessed things of the life to come; and thus have our minds running along the lines of justice at all times.

## **WE SHOULD NOT WAIT FOR THE LORD'S CHASTENING HAND**

No one can cultivate justice until he gets some appreciation of what it *is*. This necessary knowledge is obtained through the Scriptures. Some are born with a larger sense of justice than are others and some are born who seem to have no appreciation of right or wrong. But whether we have, naturally, a keen sense of justice or not, the Bible is the standard. As we know, the Scriptures say that we should do unto others as we would that they should do unto us; that we should forgive others as we would they should forgive us. When we have considered well these first lessons, then we are ready to cultivate justice and to put it into practice in our daily lives. This we do by asking in respect to our words and acts, Did I tell the *truth*? And

was it *just* to tell it? Was it *right* to tell it? Was it in harmony with what I should wish others to tell in respect to *my affairs*? Did I do the right thing?

Whoever is in the school of Christ is there to study and practice along the lines of justice and of love. It is the work of a *life time*. We find that we can improve from day to day. We should not wait for the Lord to chasten us, but should be so desirous of having the Lord's will done in us that we would *scrutinize* our thoughts. We should walk circumspectly. We should think about what we are doing, about what we are thinking. We should not allow our thoughts to ramble. People who do so do not keep themselves under proper grip. The *will* dominates the life. First of all, we should make a full surrender to the Lord by giving him our wills, the control over our thoughts, our words, our actions. Those who have accepted the control of Christ over their affairs are not at liberty to act as they will. They are to be controlled by his Word, and to walk according to his rules. Our Master said, "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another as I have loved you." (John 13:34.) This is more than justice. The Lord so loved the world that he laid down his life for them. So should we be ready and willing to lay down our lives for the brethren.

We are not to allow our minds to run along lines that would be unjust. We are to learn to apply this test of justice to every thought and word and act of ours, while learning at the same time to view the conduct of others, so far as reason will permit, from the standpoint of mercy, pity, forgiveness, helpfulness. But we cannot be too careful how we criticize every thought we entertain, every plan we may mature, that the lines of justice shall in no way be infringed by us with our heart's approval.

## OUR MINDS SHOULD BE FILLED WITH THAT WHICH IS PURE AND LOVELY

In scrutinizing our thoughts from the viewpoint of *purity*, we should consider, first, the *nature* of the thoughts; and, second, their influence upon *others*. Not only should our thoughts be true and honorable and just and right, but they should be *pure*, and such as will not excite others to impurity. We should avoid anything that, while not impure in itself, might have the effect of arousing impurity in another. The Apostle's thought seems to be that we should guard our thoughts at all times.

"Whatsoever things are lovely" calls to our attention the fact that we should not allow our minds to *dwell* upon things that are not lovely, that are not praiseworthy. We might permit our *business* to so fill our thoughts that we would think continually about that particular thing; for instance, one interested in the iron business might always think about structural iron; another, about the coal business; another, about potatoes and codfish, etc. These things might be just enough, true enough, honorable enough, but constant thought on these lines is not profitable to the New Creature. When we are employed in digging, we should give attention to that business; when we are in the iron-work business, we should give proper attention to it. But when we are in the *thinking* business, we should not allow our minds to dwell on the things which the Apostle stipulates to be injurious. We must endeavor to bring our thoughts into subjection and train them along the lines that will transform us more and more into our Lord's glorious character likeness.

Our thoughts must not only be true, honorable and just, but they must be pure, they must be beautiful. By the word beautiful we understand, not only the thoughts relating to the beauties of nature, the flowers, the animal [R4828 : page 167] creation, the fruits, etc., but also and chiefly the things of *character* – the fruits and graces of the Holy Spirit – meekness, gentleness, patience, long-suffering,

brotherly-kindness, love. With these things our minds can become filled and enamored. If, on the contrary, we allow ourselves to neglect these things that are pure, just, lovely, we shall not grow in the fruits of the Spirit; but by thinking on these things and cultivating them in our hearts we become more and more God-like. If we do not cultivate these desirable qualities, then will be developed envy, hatred, strife, works of the flesh and of the Devil – the fruits contrary to righteousness.

In a word, then, we can hardly overestimate the importance of right thinking. There are on record instances of persons who were naturally depraved in mind, but who, by giving their attention to the things of the Truth, have become very noble characters, indeed. We can scarcely overestimate the power of the mind over the body. If we take pleasure in the cultivation of the fruits of the Spirit, they will prove a rich blessing to ourselves and to others. Thus we shall follow in the Master's footsteps and eventually become overcomers and associates with him in the Kingdom.

### **PURITY OF THOUGHT AN ESSENTIAL**

We are to love and cultivate that which is *pure* to such an extent that that which is impure will become painful to us, distressing, and we shall desire to drop it from memory. This will be accomplished only by continually thinking upon those things that are pure, and avoiding the giving of thought to the things that are impure. We are to recognize true loveliness and to esteem it. When we would think on the purest of things, we must of necessity lift our mental vision to as high a point as possible and, as nearly as we may be able, discern the loveliness of the perfect character of our God and of our Lord Jesus Christ and, proportionately, the loveliness manifested in one and another of the followers of Jesus who walk closely in his footsteps.

"If there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things." While we should not think to praise ourselves nor to strive to

obtain praise, yet we should strive to be praiseworthy. We should think about the praise of God. If there is anything that has any value, any merit, that has anything worthy of praise, we should recognize it. We should note in those about us, and particularly in the Church, the elements of character which are worthy of praise. We should not underestimate gentleness, faithfulness, patience. We should take note of constancy, of energy, of devotion to duty. We should not think of the trifling failures of others or of even their greater failures. If we continue to fill our minds with unhappy thoughts, we shall do injury to ourselves. As we continue to recognize the commendable things in our own lives and in the lives of those about us, we shall become the more God-like.

Things of any virtue, or value, things in any degree praiseworthy – the noble words, or noble deeds, or noble sentiments of anyone – we may safely meditate upon and, as a consequence, find ourselves growing toward those ideals upon which our minds, our new natures, thus feed.

Thus shall we become more and more transformed by the renewing of our minds, and approach nearer and nearer to the glorious likeness of our Master, being changed from glory to glory, inch by inch, step by step, little by little, during the present life; and our thoughts being in this attitude and our union with the Lord maintained, we shall have part in the First Resurrection, which will perfect us forever in the Lord's image and likeness.

