

## THE TRANSFORMING INFLUENCE OF THOUGHT

"As he thinketh in his heart, so is he." (Proverbs 23:7.) "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life."  
– Proverbs 4:23.

THE HEART is one of the most important organs of our body. If it ceases to work, death is sure to follow. The blood that flows through the heart constitutes the life, the energy of the body. If the blood current is interrupted for a little while, a clot is formed. This is so much of a preparation for death. There must be a continual stream of blood circulating through our bodies to keep life there.

In view of this important function of our natural hearts, the Bible very properly uses the heart, the center of life, as a symbol of the center of our affections, including the will. Our will has to do with everything we do. Whoever of the Lord's people wills to seek more and more to purify himself becomes more and more alive. If we are pure in heart, we resolve to live righteously and soberly in the present life. Whoever appreciates the principle that right is *right*, and wrong is *wrong* will desire to live right – whether Jew or Gentile or the Church of God.

The Church, having accepted God's terms, have made a consecration of their lives to Him. They have engaged to fight a good fight against the world, the flesh and the Devil. They are under special obligations as New Creatures. Their hopes and ambitions are separate from those of the world. They are therefore doubly responsible in respect to their hearts, which represent their inmost sentiments.

According to a man's innermost sentiment, so is he. As a man thinketh in his heart, so is his real character. What is your real will? What are your real sentiments? Not, What *words* do you use? not, What are your *actions*? but, What is the  *motive* underlying all these?

The New Creature is to be God-like, spiritual, eventually of the spirit nature in glory – perfect. But before it attains that perfection, the heart of the New Creature is required to prove its loyalty. Some will be overcomes in a higher sense than others, but none will be overcomers except those who are true, loyal, pure. If, therefore, we have made a consecration to God, it would be our endeavor that our hearts, our desires, our motives be perfect. The only proper attitude is to confess our imperfections, if we are wrong. God expects us to be loyal of *heart*. And that loyalty of heart should reach out and control the whole life.

If our thoughts are not according to our ideals, we should endeavor to make them so. We should put away anger, malice, hatred, strife, and all such works of the flesh and the Devil. With some people, in some conditions, these thoughts go very deep. It is not the transitory thoughts of the mind – the passing thoughts – that are meant in our text. Even people of very bad character may at times have deep emotions. The eyes of some persons will be suffused with tears over some trivial matter. This makes them appear to be very tender-hearted, and yet their lives may show that they would as easily be moved to some vicious deed as to sympathy.

We see this fact illustrated in the conduct of mobs. The people who hailed Jesus as King were five days later crying, "Crucify Him!" Those who shortly before had seemed to be so appreciative of Him appeared to lose that appreciation.

## **IMPORTANCE OF RIGHT THINKING**

In reality a man is not always what on the surface he seems to be. His real character is deep down below – the purpose of his life. These are not the mere transitory thoughts, but the deep fissures of thought, if we may so designate those which involve the whole life. The Scriptures bring to our attention the fact that we are to be transformed by the renewing of our minds – by having them made over. – Rom. 12:2.

The Apostle, speaking of some very vicious traits of character, says, "And such were some of you, but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." (1 Cor. 6:11.) This cleansing, this sanctifying, comes not merely through the reading of the Truth, or the *mental* application of the Truth, but through the *heart* – thinking on the Truth. This heart-thinking, these deep resolutions, are ours as Christians, and are to be guided by certain principles. These have to do with the real man whom God is considering – not the old creature, more or less blemished, according to the degree of depravity. God looks at the New Creature.

These deep heart convictions and purposes constitute a transformation of character. This is the man's *real* condition, and so is *he*. If he have some transitory emotion of anger or of malice, it would not be his *real* thought, his *real* intention. Therefore it would not be *he*, but his old *nature*, temporarily asserting itself. As a New Creature, he is to watch his words, his thoughts, his actions. If a transitory, wrong thought should pass through his mind, it would not be the thought of his heart. And he as a New Creature, should stop it, put it away, so that it [R5247 : page 164] may not take root in his heart, and choke out better sentiments.

This right thinking of the heart has very much to do with the whole life. The Apostle says that we are transformed by the renewing of our minds, to know what is the perfect will of God. This is the Christian's standpoint. How glad we are that our Heavenly Father is judging us from this standpoint! How glad we are that He is able to read the heart, that He knows our hearts, that He knows our inmost thoughts!

At one time we might have thought that we were doing God service when we were not. We show our loyalty to God by giving attention to His Word, that we may know what is His will. The more we study God's Word, the more we receive the spirit of the Truth,

and the more we appreciate it. And in proportion as we understand God's regulations and desire to be guided by them, our hearts will become purified. Then the more care shall we take of our hands, what they shall do; and of our tongues, what they shall say. Thus we shall keep our hearts – submit our wills to the will of God.

The will is a part of our heart, just as the rudder is a part of the ship. The new will is the rudder to steer us this way or that way. The more we understand the Word of the Lord, the better we understand how to guide our lives. Therefore we are to keep our hearts and purify them by the *knowledge* of God's Truth, the *study* of God's Truth. To do this, the will must ever be on the alert, watching with prayer and thanksgiving.

### **THE CHURCH ON TRIAL FOR LIFE**

Some one may ask, why should we do all this? In a general way we might answer, that we may do right – because right is *right*. But that reason is not sufficient for us. While all appreciate the superiority of right over wrong, yet in our fallen condition we need to have some inducements to action. So the Lord puts certain inducements before us. He says, "If your heart is right, I desire to give you everlasting life. If your heart is wrong, then you will not be of the kind to whom I will grant this boon. You will die the Second Death."

Six thousand years ago there was a trial. Our first father, Adam, was tried, and failed. Consequently we have no right to life. But God has arranged through our Lord Jesus that every member of Adam's race may have another trial. The Father is willing to give life everlasting to all who love righteousness.

So we thankfully accept this provision, and say, "Heavenly Father, wilt Thou indeed give us another opportunity for gaining everlasting life? We would love to have that life! We are very thankful for the opportunity! We love righteousness! If we are loyal

to the principles of righteousness, shall we get everlasting life? It is our desire that Thy will be done in us – even that we love righteousness and hate iniquity." "Very well, then," the Heavenly Father says, "I will put you into the School of Christ, where you will learn righteousness."

Day by day we are learning in the School of Christ. Our different experiences are a part of the general instructions for those who love righteousness and who desire to be taught of the Lord. The issue of our trial will be life or death. The world is not now on trial. There is no possibility for the world to gain life as yet. During this Gospel Age the Church are the only ones who are under this Covenant of Sacrifice – who are on trial, therefore, for everlasting life or everlasting death. In the next Age, the world will have their opportunity for learning obedience. Then the issue for them will be life or death.

God says, "I have set before you life and death, blessing or cursing." There is a curse for every one who loves unrighteousness; there is a blessing for every one who loves righteousness. So during the thousand years of Christ's Reign the world will be on trial for everlasting life or everlasting death. All who are obedient will get everlasting life. But all who have the spirit of Satan will be destroyed in the Second Death.

Only those who are more than mere overcomers will be of the Royal Priesthood. There is no excuse for our getting into the Great Company. Let us keep our hearts with all diligence. Let us watch our hearts. If they are in full harmony with God's will, we shall have little trouble with our tongues. "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." – Math. 12:34.

Our heart is the most wonderful organ of our body. The tongue is the most subtle of all our members. The Lord takes our words as an index of our heart condition. But since we are imperfect, it is not possible for us to be faultless in word and deed. Yet we are diligently

and faithfully to seek to attain the perfect mastery of our words. We should be especially on guard in respect to evil speaking. Every tendency toward slander is to be checked. Whoever of us is reviled is not to revile again. These tendencies belong to the old nature. To be pleasing to the Master, we are to keep our hearts free from every form of evil. If this be done, the heart is rightly instructed of the Lord. Then we will know that we must make good whatever is wrong. We are bound, thoroughly bound, to make it good to the best of our ability. Our heart must keep itself right.

### **DEFICIENCY IN MODERN EDUCATION**

This same principle is applicable to the whole world, though not on a scale so far reaching. Mankind are influenced by thought, by experience. So vicious children may be trained up under favorable environments to become useful citizens. We have seen where, even with people of the world, good resolutions to live honestly, justly, soberly, have had a blessed influence on the life, making noble men and women, although these may not be Christians.

We have also seen the reverse of this – those who were criminals, but not so of necessity. Some of them were born under good conditions; but have read bad books and meditated upon sinful things. Thus the thoughts of their hearts have been evil instead of good. Thus they have become inclined toward evil. As they allow their minds to run in a certain direction, and allow these thoughts to become deeply rooted in their hearts, some of them become very vicious.

We were deeply impressed with this fact in noticing the photographs of the four gunmen recently convicted of murder in New York. Had we seen their pictures before knowing who they were, we should have said, "Those are strong characters." Their hearts had gone wrong, doubtless because of wrong education and a failure to appreciate the principles of righteousness. This seems to be largely the case at the present time. Very few see the principles of

righteousness at all. The majority are swayed by superstition, by fear and by hopes which are more or less ephemeral, more or less deceptive.

So we see that the general education of our day is lacking in a very important respect. Although the schools have taken away to some extent the veil of ignorance and superstition, yet they are not giving instead the full, proper view of righteousness. This is because in a general way the Divine character and the Divine laws are being ignored. There is an attempt to teach mortality entirely [R5247 : page 165] aside from the Divine Law. But this course seems to be undermining faith – separating the pupils from faith in a Supreme Creator. Thus we see that while the world is making wonderful progress in education, yet it is not reaching its own ideals. The human mind in its fallen and perverted condition, is unable to see the subject of morality from a standpoint which educators would put before it.

The human mind needs the influence of its higher organs to assist the lower organs. Hence, although these educational influences are beneficial in many respects, yet they are very injurious in others. They do not inculcate veneration for God and for the Divine will. Therefore people are unable to grasp the best principles. The only persons who are in the right attitude are those who are seeking to have new thoughts, to have thoughts conformed to the Divine arrangement, taking the mind of Christ instead of their own imaginations and judgment, and thus growing up into Him in all things. This is our happy position.

## **INFLUENCE OF THOUGHT UPON HEALTH**

There is another view of the text – "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he" – given by Christian Scientist; namely, that according to our minds, so be it unto us. They get some good out of this view. They say that if one thinks about kind, noble things, he will be influenced thus. We think our Christian Scientist friends are partly right and partly wrong. They hold that if one thinks himself to be



well, he will be well; that if one thinks himself to be sick, he will be sick. There is a *measure* of truth in this view.

One-half the people in the world are sick because they think they are so. If they thought, not about their aches and pains, but about more helpful things, they would no doubt be better and stronger in every way. The mind has something to do with our condition. Whoever mopes about a headache will undoubtedly make it worse. Whoever tries to put the thought of his condition away and to give attention to other things will undoubtedly help himself.

The less we think about our aches and pains the better for us. If we talk about them we aggravate them. It is also bad to exercise too much sympathy with each other. Of course, there are times when it would be cruel not to show sympathy. But it is not wise to encourage those who are weak to complain about their condition. We become stronger in proportion as we try to avoid thinking of our ailments.

The mistake made by our Christian Scientist friends is that they carry this principle too far. *Thinking* ourselves sound will not *make* us so. And it would not be right to lie about the matter, and to say that we have no aches and pains when we have them. The middle line is the one which the Bible encourages – not to say that we have neither aches nor pains, not to say that death is "mortal error," and that there is no death. But we can help the [R5248 : page 165] dying process along, or we can seek to cultivate the more helpful thoughts, and thus exercise a helpful influence upon ourselves and others.

One notices this principle in action in a sick room. Some people will go into the sick room, express a great deal of sympathy, and leave the sick person under the impression that he is in a much worse condition than he really is; whereas they should have helped the person by encouraging remarks. It is not necessary to say to the sick, "You are looking extremely bad!" But we might say, "Are you feeling better this morning? Have you had a good rest?" Many people



do not know how much they do rest, and do not feel thankful enough. So we might suggest, "I hope you are feeling thankful to the Lord, and that you are glad because of this beautiful day. See how the sun shines into your room! Hear the birds sing!" The condition of some people when they are sick is that of "groanings which cannot be uttered." Sick people need some one to bring sunshine into the room.

So, then, dear friends, let us resolve that since we have covenanted with the Lord to become dead to the old life, to the old ambitions, to the things of the past, these are to be all given over. We will wish to think as the Lord would have us think, to view all the affairs of life as He would have us view them, and to be influenced by the ambitions which He sets before us in His Word. Thus doing, we shall as New Creatures grow into the character-likeness of the Lord.

