

## HOLINESS OF HEAD - Attitudes

Holiness is much less complicated than we realize. The simplicity of it lies in its intention. Its aim is to bring our entire being, starting on the inside and working its way out, into harmony with the will of God and aligned to the values of Jesus. It sounds simple there are both attractions and distractions that will divert our attention and focus. The good news is that there is grace enough for this. As our 10<sup>th</sup> doctrine reminds us “We believe that it is the privilege of all believers to be wholly sanctified, and that their whole spirit, soul, and body may be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” That’s a very holistic approach to holiness.

I’m convinced that the primary battleground in the ongoing process of holiness takes place between our ears. We win the battle, first of all, by allowing the Spirit of God to teach us to think right. Peter talks about "wholesome thinking" in 2 Peter 3:1. I think he's referring to proper thinking. We need proper thinking to help us see the world as it really is, not as our emotions might dictate or as culture dictates. Faithfulness to God means foreignness to world. We also need proper thinking about ourselves. Proper thinking reminds us that we are no longer what we were but also that we are not yet what we will be and it takes some thought to figure out how that works itself out in everyday living. That’s why I keep telling my people “Don’t check your brains at the door when you come to church.”

"As a man thinketh in his heart, so he is" (KJV).

Jack Shell, a motivational speaker and soldier of the Orillia Corps remind us; “Your thoughts become you.” It’s true. Your attitudes define you. Your mental habits shape you. What's going on in your head governs what you do, how you live. As you think, so you are. It's all in your head. Stephen Covey reminds us, “I’m not a product of my circumstances I’m a product of my decisions.” What you think about what happens to you determines the decisions you make and how you will react.

One day when I was jogging in Cape Town, South Africa I stubbed my toe on a raised portion of the sidewalk. It must have been a pathetic sight as this 50+ year old man flailed and grasped at the air to prevent the inevitable; I was going down and it was going to be a painful landing as my knees hit the concrete sidewalk. While I was trying desperately to avoid the fall I noticed a young black man leaning against the fence. His body language told me that he really wanted to reach out and break my fall but I also sensed his hesitation and final decision not to intervene. Something inside him really wanted to reach out to me but something also held him back. Perhaps he thought, "What might this white man think if I were to reach for him?" I have to admit that something inside me also wondered, "What's he up to?" You see just a couple of weeks earlier Lynette and I had been carjacked at gunpoint by four young blacks who had followed us to a vulnerable location, pointed a gun at me and demanded my car keys. The whole matter came tumbling back to me as I tried to avoid tumbling to the ground. I didn't want this to be the first thing I thought about whenever I looked at a black youth. My thinking was messed up. God was telling me, "I've got this, Lindsay." I was telling myself, "How am I ever going to forgive these people? I prayed, "God you have to help me! Please heal my mind and change my attitude." I am so grateful that he heard and answered that prayer. Our very next appointment was to an all black Division followed by a return to the Caribbean Territory where I would be the Chief Secretary then to Tanzania where I would be the Territorial Commander.

I guess what I'm talking about is God's ability to enable holy self-talk.

We tend to talk to ourselves all the time, don't we? In fact probably no one talks to me more than I talk to me. It's not just occasional either I do it all the time, and so do you. Whether we are aware of it or not, we talk to ourselves. "Not me," you say. "*I don't talk to myself.*" Guess what, you just talked to yourself. There's an ongoing conversation with ourselves in which we determine how we are going to respond to certain situations and how we will behave in other situations.

If you really want to listen to yourself of course you have to shut off the TV, turn off your iPad and your iPhone. You will discover that voice in our head, along with our gut (the way we feel), creates what's called intuition. Intuition is what we think with our minds and what we feeling in our gut and together that's the process we use to make most of our decisions. You've heard the term "gut feeling."

If you watch many of the police and detective shows on TV you will know that many of them place a high premium on intuition, especially "gut feeling." It can be a good thing but it needs to carry a warning label and the best label I can suggest is Proverbs 14:12, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death." It's obvious that the author really believes this because when he talks to his son he says: "Son, there's a way that's going to seem right to you." You're going to have a positive feeling in your gut and you're going to have a convincing voice in your head and you're going to conclude 'This is the way I should go,' but you need to be careful. Your intuition is not always going to be wrong but it's not fail proof either. Sometimes there will be a way that's going to seem right to you, but it's going to be the way of death. Be careful."

That voice in your head, you talking to you, and that feeling in our gut are often more influenced by the world around us than by the values of Christ as taught in scripture.

Proverbs is warning us that we often lie to ourselves. My mind and my gut lie to me all the time. If you're anything like me, you tend to be more tough on yourself than anyone else. We drive ourselves more than anyone else drives us and we tend to criticize ourselves more than anyone else does. Because of this we need to depend on God, through his Word and through prayer to show us how to determine the mind of Christ for our lives. We need to recognize and admit our propensity to lie to ourselves. Don't listen to that voice when it tells you that you are worse than you really are or better than you really are? If we are to get an objective yet loving view of ourselves we will need to listen to God because he never lies to us. He always tell us the truth about ourselves. It is not always pretty or what we might want to hear but it will be honest.

The good news of the gospel is that he will also always give us the grace to respond to his truth about ourselves.

2 Peter 3 tells us how to think and how to develop wholesome thoughts. Peter tells us a little about the future; the good and the bad and then he says, since all this is going to happen, "What kind of people ought you to be?" Then he answers his own question. "You ought to live holy and godly lives" (verse 11). And "Make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him (verse 14). Wholesome thoughts—right thinking—lead ultimately to a wholesome or correct world view. As Jack Shell said to us at the Senior's Retreat, "Change your thoughts and you change your world."

When Lynette and I were Divisional Leaders of the Western Cape Division in South Africa we were appointed by the Territorial Commander to join a team that would explore the possibility of The Army returning to Namibia after a 65 year absence. Eventually the work in Namibia became the responsibility of the Western Cape Division and I ended up making the 1500 hundred kilometer drive from Cape Town to Namibia many times. What a joy it was as we discovered Salvationists from many countries who were now living in Namibia and praying that the Army would one day return.

Among those salvationists were Makaza, a young Zimbabwean who was a trader selling his wares on the streets of Namibia and Mr. Truebody, an 82 year old engineer from South Africa who had designed many of the waterways and dams in the country. For forty two years he had been dreaming and praying about the Army's return. I will never forget our first cottage meeting in Mr. and Mrs. Truebody's home. We began with a joyful but tearful singing of O Boundless Salvation followed by a testimony time during which Makaza was the first to his feet. Pointing to Mr. Truebody he said, "I know this big man. I have seen him many times as he walked pass my stall in the outdoor mall. Every time I saw him something inside of me wanted to reach out and take his hand, I just knew we had something in common. But then I thought, 'what would he think, this big man, if a black man came running up to him with his hand out? So I didn't approach him.'" Then with tears streaming down his face he looked at Mr. Truebody,

then at me and said, “forgive me, I didn’t know he was my brother?” Change your thoughts and you change your world. What a joy it was to see the relationship that eventually developed between Makaza and Mr. Truebody simply because they now saw themselves as brothers in Christ.

In the conclusion of II Peter chapter 3 the apostle challenges us to “Grow in grace and knowledge.” It’s a reminder that there is grace enough to empower our living until everything we think or do is assisted or enabled by grace. Enabling grace is perhaps God’s greatest gift to humankind. Azariah said in 2 Chron. 15:2, “If you seek him, he will let you find him.” So even our seeking is enabled by the grace that goes before, prevenient grace. God can enable us to think holy, wholesome thoughts.

The ultimate power we have as human beings is to select what we will allow our minds to dwell upon. A. W. Tozer says, “God tells us to make a sanctuary of our thoughts in which he can dwell.” When Paul says “Think about such things....” In Philippians 4:8 he presupposes that we have the ability to control what we think about. We may not be totally free here but we do have great liberty and potential.

“Prepare your minds for action” I Peter 1:13.

All the root sins are first of all thoughts: Arrogance, Envy, Malice, Greed, Lust, they all begin with a thought. If we can prepare our mind for sinful action, why not for holy action?

Paul tells us that we need to have a change of mind from the way we used to think before we became Christians. Romans 12:2, “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind....” Ephesians 4:23, “To be made new in the attitude of your minds.” Do you think that was easy for Paul? He had a dramatic encounter with Jesus on the Damascus road but yet he went to Arabia and for three years was incognito. Why? Because a man with convictions and passions that were totally foreign and opposed to the gospel must now have a whole new way of thinking. It wouldn't happen overnight. Remember, salvation is more than a walk down the aisle.

I've come to realize that in the western world the great omission to our Christian experience is the awareness that conversion and the life of holiness demands a fundamental change in the way we think, in the values and goals and ambitions of our lives. We tend to buy into the culture in which we were converted and often bring that with us into the church. Paul turned his back on everything he once held dear because Jesus wasn't in it. Some of you need to do that this weekend. You need to think through the implications of what it means to know Christ.

We need to take control of our thought life if we want to be in control of our lives. Someone has said that the mind is the central citadel of the personality. The Bible says it best, "As a man thinks in his heart, so he is." If we could take our thoughts this very morning and put them on a screen for everyone to see, would they bring glory to God and joy to us or would God be dishonored and you and I ashamed?

What we need is the mind under the control of the Spirit. Philippians 2:5, Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus." The NIV says, "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus."

We need to realize that what we think will eventually affect the decisions we make and the things we choose to do so we must ask God to help us to be holy in our minds and to take control of our thought life. How do we do this? The Bible has the answer!

Hebrews 3:1 "Fix your thoughts on Jesus..." You can take that two ways. Fix your broken or mistaken thoughts about Jesus or in its proper context set your thoughts on Jesus; think about him intently.

Philippians 4:8, "Finally brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things."

Ephesians 4:23, "Be renewed in the spirit of your minds."

Isa. 26:3, "You will keep in perfect peace he whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you."

Colossians 3:2, "Set your minds on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God."

Romans 8:5-6, "Those who live by the sinful nature have their minds set on what the sinful nature desires, but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of the sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so."

2 Tim. 1:7, "For God did not give us a spirit (attitude) of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love, and of self-discipline."

1 Peter 1:13, "Therefore, prepare your minds for action..."

Psalms 26:2, "Test me, O Lord, and try me, examine my heart and my mind."

Matthew 22:37, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your MIND."

In His book *Renovation of the Heart*, Dallas Willard points out that holiness involves four aspects of our thought life:

*Ideas, Images, Information, and our ability to think.*

I want to revisit these four aspects and interact with Willard's material to help us better understand these dimensions of our personality and life.

We have ideas about what is right and wrong, we have perceptions about reality. A lot of those ideas are a product of our upbringing and change as you move from one culture to another but these must be called into question as an adult, especially in the light of the gospel and the Spirit of Christ.

Having lived in four countries outside of Canada we've seen varying ideas of Freedom, Religion, Home, God and we've had to evaluate and reevaluate our own ideas to make sure they have been informed and transformed by the Spirit of God.

This involves recognizing the ideas of evil that govern the present world, the culture from which we come and the culture to which we have come. It's not easy to see the water you swim in. I'm amazed at what I see after being outside of Canada for so many years. I'm amazed at what I see when I come home to Nf after so many years away. I'm shocked at what we've come to see as normal and what no longer causes us to blush. I'm shocked that we've allowed our culture to define our beliefs and how uncritically we've adapted and adopted a purely secularized society. We prefer to be called tolerant but we've actually become one of the most permissive countries in the world. Coming back has actually been more difficult than going.

Ephesians 6:12; "the Powers" refers to an elusive form of a spirit or underlying mindset if you wish that permeates and hides deep within systems and structures. Friends, there is an underlying agenda. The powers work insidiously but effectively sowing evil without ever becoming visible. It requires deep thought to identify the powers and expose them to the light of the Word. This world has an agenda and it is not a gospel-friendly agenda.

Renew your mind by the power of the Spirit (Rom. 12:2). Why? Because we tend to buy into what our culture is selling. Changing our ideas can be one of the most difficult and painful things in human life. We've come to cherish these and to regard them as sacrosanct. Genuine conversion is a very painful experience (John 3:16).

Jesus confronted and undermined the idea system of his day, both religious and secular, and it killed him.

IMAGES are closely related to ideas and are loaded with feeling.

Every idea system is reinforced with a powerful set of images. During the Rwandan genocide in order to justify and deaden their senses to the unthinkable things they did to the Tutsi tribe the Hutu referred to them as tall trees that needed to be chopped down or as cockroaches that needed to be stomped on. We have images that we relate to godliness or holiness and things we exclude from those categories.

Images often determine how we feel about things. Like many of our childhood ideas and teachings growing up here in Newfoundland. Most of them I cherish. This is where my eyes

were formed; as I learned to see the world through the lenses of scripture. But some of those ideas have had to be jettisoned in the light of scripture. They just didn't compare well to what I found as I looked more closely at God in his Word. What you believe about God is the most important thing about you so you had better be sure it's biblical. What image comes to your mind as you think about God? Is it biblical?

Holiness is the ongoing process whereby we identify and exchange our ideas and images for God's ideas and images.

#### INFORMATION

Rom. 10:14, "How shall they believe in him whom they have not heard?" Charles Wesley captures the human situation in his hymn

*Long my imprisoned spirit lay,*

*Fast bound in sin and Nature's night;*

Then comes the galvanizing good news of the gospel

*Thine eye diffused a quickening ray,*

*I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;*

*My chains fell off, my heart was free,*

*I rose, went forth and followed thee.*

Lack of information sets us up for all sorts of dangers and mishaps. Without correct information our ability to think has nothing to work on. Leaders are readers but make sure you're reading the right stuff. Don't spend more time reading books about the bible than you spend reading the bible itself.

Hosea 4:6; "My people are destroyed from lack of information." 4:14b "A people without understanding will come to ruin."

OUR ABILITY TO THINK: Holiness requires thinking.

What is thinking? It's the activity of searching out what MUST be true, or CANNOT be true in the light of given facts or assumptions. EG. Because of the law of gravity, rocks do not fall upward. It is putting the bits and pieces into a larger picture.

Doctor Robert Doctor used to use the term 'STINKIN' THINKIN.'

In the West we start every day with a start and that to me is stinkin' thinkin'. What happens in the morning? The alarm goes off. Why do we call it an "alarm" clock? Why not an opportunity clock? Did you notice in the creation story that the day begins with the evening? We begin the day with rest and God's meets us in the morning. We are called to begin our day in sync with the rhythms of creation not with a start that sets us running a rat race until we collapse on our beds again. What's the prize? You win the race? You're still just a rat.

Booker T. Washington tells a great story about a slave the first day after emancipation. Very early in the morning she was heard chasing the old red rooster around the yard of her little house. When she caught it she royally rang its neck and started to dress it for supper. It was partly a celebration and partly a resolution. Never again would this rooster awaken her sons to a day of slavery. She had executed the alarm clock. There's a sense in which we too need to kill the alarm clocks in our life that keep us moving at such a frenetic pace. We had to learn a whole new concept of time when we started working with people of African descent. In Swahili they would say, "polay, polay Kanali." Slowly, slowly, Colonel. We need to train our minds to think and to make time to reflect each day.

"As a man thinketh in his heart, so he is" might suggest to us that holiness begins in your head." After all what's going on in your head governs what you do, how you live.

In Colossians 1:21, Paul writes, "Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior." What he's saying is rebellion against God begins between our ears. There are thoughts and attitudes that your mind and your heart are generating that are keeping you alienated from God. That's why when Jesus teaches the great principles of the

kingdom in the Sermon on the Mount, he pushes holiness beyond the behavioral and into the psychological.

For example, Jesus says, "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder'... but I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment." Then he says, "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart." Jesus is pushing holiness beyond the behavioral and into the psychological—into the innermost place of who we are. When Jesus speaks of the psychological, he uses the Greek word that means "soul." He is talking about the innermost part of you that sees, perceives, thinks, and judges. He is saying it all begins in your head. This is why the idea of repentance literally means to change your mind or to stop thinking the way you're thinking and start thinking the way God thinks.

1 Corinthians 2:16. Paul writes: "For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ."

Here's a few ways to work with the Spirit to shape the way you think.

First, Practice repentance. Change your mind. That's what "repent" literally means: to change your mind. Stop thinking in ways that you know are out of line with the kingdom of God. You know from Scripture what God wants for you, and you know the thoughts you entertain that keep you from obtaining them. *Repent*. You have to change your mind. You have to repent.

Secondly, do what Paul talks about in 2 Corinthians 10: 3-6. Paul reminds us that we do not fight with the weapons of this world to demolish strongholds. The word "stronghold" is a military word for a fortress. Paul is talking about the established, entrenched ways of thinking, acting, and reacting that are in opposition to the ways of God. He says we build these strongholds for defense purposes and he says we have to tear them down, demolish them. He uses combat language. We are to "take every thought captive and lead it obedient to Jesus." In other words, the thoughts that are feeding the things that are taking us captive—the angry thoughts, the

resentful thoughts, the lustful thoughts—we have the power to conquer and reverse them. We can take captive those captive thoughts and throw them into prison.

The third thing you need to do to work with the Spirit on your thought life is to start worshiping God. In Romans 12, Paul says that the renewing of our minds—the renewing of our thinking—is key to our transformation. We become new creatures by renewing our minds in worship; not just on Sunday but every day of our lives. Even worship begins in your head!

The fourth thing you need to cooperate with the Spirit on is to rebuild a different kind of world in your mind through Scripture. Consider the first three verses of [Psalm 1](#)

Blessed is the man who does not walk in the way of the wicked

Or stand in the way of sinners Or sit in the seat of mockers,

But his delight is in the law of the Lord,

And on his law he meditates day and night.

He is like a tree planted by water, which yields its fruit in season

And whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.

The person who is saturated in the Word of God is constantly refreshed and shaped by the Word of God. If someone meditates on the glory of God, they live with a sense of God's magnificent splendor. Allow the Word of God to shape your thoughts.

2 Peter 3:2 says, "I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Savior through your apostles." The phrase "holy prophets" refers to the Old Testament. "The command given by our Lord and Savior" refers to the oral tradition of Jesus' teaching already circulating among believers, as well as the letters of Paul, and probably the gospel of Mark. Peter is saying, in effect: "Do you want to develop wholesome thoughts? Let these words shape your thoughts. Learn to think like the prophets thought. Look at life the way Jesus taught us to. Live the way the apostles teach us to live."