

The Right Kind of Thinking

[Obviously, this study is not exhaustive. Expand it as much as you wish, by adding other passages you find in the Word! Check the context of the verses. There are often many insights to be found as one studies the relationship of nearby verses to the ones that have our primary focus. (The verses below are summarized, NOT quoted.)]

[After studying this, you may wish to review the questions a second time. Sometimes verses may be relevant to other sections, in addition to the ones they are found in.]

PART 1: Bad Thinking

PART 2: What We Need to Do about It

PART 3: Good Thinking - Our General Perspective

PART 4: Good Thinking - an Essential Aspect

PART 5: Precautions to Be Taken During Self-evaluation

PART 6: A Few Comments about God's Thoughts, Compared to Ours

PART 1: Bad Thinking

A. It Is a Futile (Meaningless, Empty, Valueless) Way of Thinking

Psalm 94:11 (also quoted in 1 Corinthians 3:20)

The Lord knows the futility of people's thoughts.

Romans 1:21

(Because people turned against God) their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts/minds became filled with darkness. (The reference is to humanity as a whole - all of us.)

B. It Is Related to a Corrupt, Sinful Nature (The "Flesh")

Ephesians 2:3

(Before God saved us) we used to do the things our corrupt nature wanted - doing whatever it desired or thought about doing.

C. It Is a Reflection of What Is in the "Heart" ("Heart" includes intellect, will, emotions, etc.)

Matthew 15:19

Out of the heart come evil thoughts (and all the other things listed in the verse).

[See also: Mark 7:21]

D. We must No Longer Live this Way; We must Turn from Our Evil Thoughts and Ways

Ephesians 4:17

You must no longer live like the Gentiles (the unsaved) do, with minds filled with futile, empty thoughts.

Isaiah 55:7

The wicked must forsake his ways; the evil person must forsake his thoughts. (Turn to the Lord...)

Comments & Questions:

- What causes bad thinking? What is the relationship of one's sinful heart (or corrupt nature) to one's thoughts? *Why* must we stop having bad thinking?
 - For further study: Look at the concept of "fool" (and similar terms) in the book of Proverbs. Many of the Proverbs focus on the contrast between wisdom and folly, and how these affect our relationship with other people. But there are also passages (in the Proverbs and elsewhere) which focus on the effect that these ways of thinking have on our relationship with God. As you read the Proverbs and meditate on (think about) them, examine the way you think about things. Are your thoughts wise (good thinking) or foolish (bad thinking)?
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PART 2: What We Need to Do about It

A. "Clothe" Ourselves with Jesus: Allow Him to Influence All Our Thoughts [Also translated: "put on" Jesus (just like putting on clothes).]

Romans 13:14

Clothe yourselves with [or "put on"] the Lord Jesus Christ. Do not think about how to gratify the sinful nature's desires.

B. Grow-up in Our Thinking (Have Mature, Rather than Childish Thinking)

1 Corinthians 14:20

Stop thinking like children, ...but like adults (mature). Of course, as far as evil is concerned, be "infants" (that is, be "inexperienced")!

C. "Capture" Our Thoughts to Make Them Obedient to Christ

2 Corinthians 10:5

We must attack all false thinking that opposes knowledge of God. We must "capture" every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

Comments & Questions:

- Are there some bad thoughts you need to stop thinking? What do these verses say you need to do about them? These verses suggest that you cannot merely "stop" bad thoughts. Rather, you need to "replace" them. You need to *exchange* one type of perspective (or conduct) for another. What are some ways you can exchange your bad thoughts for good ones?
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PART 3: Good Thinking - Our General Perspective: We must Focus Our Attention on Anything/Everything That Is Good

A. Thinking about Excellent and Praiseworthy Things ["Excellent" can also be translated as: "virtuous, good or right."]

Philippians 4:8

Think about anything that is excellent and worthy of praise. (a list of 6 good qualities is also given) [See also v. 9, which focuses on our *actions*.]

Comments & Questions:

- This section may contain only one verse, but it covers everything we can think about! Study the context. How do actions and thoughts go together?
 - There are many ways we can use the Word to help us accomplish what this verse tells us to do. Here are some suggested ways:
 1. Examine the context surrounding the verses listed in the "bad thinking" section. Do any of the passages suggest *how* to replace the bad thoughts with good ones? Do any of them give examples of good thoughts to have?
 2. Learning the ways of wisdom. [We must pay attention to its "rebuke" of our wrong ways.]
 - Proverbs 1:23 - If you had paid attention to my rebuke, I would have ... made my thoughts (or words) known to you.
 - The early chapters of Proverbs describe the benefits of learning the ways of wisdom. [In this verse (1:23), wisdom is personified, and those who are *unwilling* to pay attention are being rebuked.] Do you want to learn the ways of wisdom? Explore the book of Proverbs! After all, wisdom should influence ALL our thinking! Two things you can look for are: 1) the contrasts between words such as wisdom and folly (and similar concepts), and 2) other concepts which are associated with being wise.
 3. The two greatest commands involve love for God and love for neighbor (Matthew 22:37-40). Scripture gives us many instructions in how we can fulfill our obligations. What are some of the commands and obligations we have, a) toward God? b) toward people (including both friends and enemies)? These would be good things to think about! How can you apply them to your life?
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PART 4: Good Thinking - an Essential Aspect: We must Focus on God and What He Has Done

A. Thinking about God / Jesus Christ

Psalm 63:6

I think of you throughout the night. [This word "think" is often translated "meditate."]

Hebrews 3:1

focus your thoughts on Jesus...

B. Thinking about What God Has Done in the past (Things Done among Other People) [Context: During Trials]

Psalm 77:5

I thought about the days of long ago...

Psalm 77:10

[This passage occurs during a transition between the psalmist's doubts and anxiety, and his confidence and trust. So interpretations vary, depending on which aspect the translator believes this verse is connected with. With either interpretation, we finally reach the same conclusion!]

- *If connected with the doubts and anxiety of vs. 7- 9:* The psalmist is wondering if God's "right hand" still works in mighty ways, as it did in the past. By v. 11, he reaches the conviction that God *does* still work in such ways.
- *If connected with the hope and reassurance of vs. 11-12(+):* He is reflecting on what God did in the past, and beginning to realize that God's mighty works in the past provide a basis for trusting him in the present.

Psalm 77:11

(An expression of trust in God): I will remember the deeds / miracles that the Lord did long ago... [Perhaps this idea is implied: The God we can trust today is the same God they were able to trust back then. And he has not changed.]

C. Thinking about What God Has Done in the past (Things Done in Our Own Lives) [Context: God saved us when we were "nobodies" - as viewed by the world.]

1 Corinthians 1:26

Remember the type of people you were when God saved you. Not many of you were wise (by human standards), or influential, or of noble birth. [Just think... The fact that he was willing to do this is an expression of his love for us!]

D. Thinking about What God Will Do in the Future (Jesus' Return and the Coming Judgment)

2 Peter 3:1

I have written these letters (1 Peter and 2 Peter) as reminders to encourage you to have correct thinking (or: a mind that is working in a "pure" or accurate manner). [In the case of 2 Peter, the "correct thinking" had to do with the certainty and significance of Jesus' second coming (v. 2+). And if you are experiencing trials, think about 1 Peter, which tells us that our present suffering will result in glory and joy when Jesus returns.]

Comments & Questions:

- The Bible places much attention on our thinking about God. This is because our relationship with God will influence the way we relate to, or interact with, everything else - with other people and with all creation.
 - 1 Corinthians 10:31 tells us that everything we do should be done in a way that brings glory (and honor) to God. Think about this passage. How would you apply 1 Corinthians 10:31 to your life? [One thing you could do would be to contrast a) how person might do things to bring honor to God, and b) how he might do things to dishonor him. You can also consider the question of how would Jesus do things, if he were doing them with you.]
 - How can you think about God as you go about your daily activities? [To help you answer this, you might think about how you would do things if you were spending a lot of time with another person - a good friend or someone you dearly love. How might being with that person influence the way you did things? (Even if the person wasn't present, just thinking about him/her, could influence the way you did things!) Now, if God has saved you, he has become your friend, and he is present at all times (Hebrews 4:13). Remember also what Jesus said: "I am with you always." (Mt. 28:20) This means that everything you do is being done with a friend.
 - For further study: A good study would be the Bible's concept of "meditation," which focuses (for the most part) on thinking about God. This word is found many times in the Old Testament, especially in the Psalms. (Some translations use the words "think," "reflect" or "consider.")
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PART 5: Precautions to Be Taken During Self-evaluation

[in addition to what is mentioned in the previous sections]

A. The Need for Self-evaluation; the Need for "Considering One's Ways"

Proverbs 14:8, 15; 21:29

The upright, sensible person gives thought to (considers/understands) his ways.
[contrasted with how the wicked, foolish, or simple-minded act]

B. Having Sober Judgment, Rather than Highly-inflated Thoughts [About Self]

Romans 12:3

How to think of yourself: NOT more highly than you ought, but with sober judgment - based on "the measure of faith." (See comments below.)

C. A Warning Against Inflated Thoughts about Our Intellectual Capabilities (Knowledge about the Bible) Especially When Love Is Absent. (See the context.)

1 Corinthians 8:2

The person who thinks he knows something [and is proud of it! - v. 1] doesn't yet have the type of knowledge he really needs.

D. The Danger of "Falling" from a Good Evaluation

1 Corinthians 10:12

Those who think they are standing firm need to be careful, lest they suddenly fall down! [context: learning from the examples of others.]

E. The Danger of Self-deception

Galatians 6:3

Those who think they are something, when they are nothing, are only deceiving themselves.

Comments & Questions:

- 2 Corinthians 13:5 tells us to test ourselves, to determine if we are really in the faith. This verse tells us to examine our relationship with God. (If you have never done this, or need to review some aspect of your relationship with God, it would be good for you to do so now.) In contrast, many of the above verses (such as those in section "A") focus not so much on our relationship with God, as on the way we interact with other people, and with the world in general.
 - "The faith" (that is, the teachings of the Scriptures) is to be the "measure," or standard, by which we judge ourselves. Such a standard is worthy of our submission, since it has its origin in God (2 Timothy 3:16-17). We must be "sober-minded" in our evaluation, aware that it is easy for us to deceive ourselves. We must also be willing to learn from others, rather than being a "simple-minded" person (as described in Proverbs) who must repeat all the mistakes and foolish ways that other people have done before him.
 - What are some of the things you might evaluate yourself for? As you read the Word, pay attention for things (attitudes, actions, etc.) you need to evaluate in your own life. You may want to focus on specific topics, or select some specific book in the Bible for your study. You may wish to reflect on the Proverbs for a while, since they give a lot of practical advice on how to live.
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PART 6: A Few Comments about God's Thoughts, Compared to Ours

A. God's Thoughts Are Higher than Ours; We Cannot Fully Comprehend Them

Isaiah 55:8-9

God's thoughts are as much "higher" than ours, as the heavens are higher than the earth.

Romans 11:33

The riches of God's wisdom and knowledge are deeper than we can fathom; his judgments and ways are greater than what we can comprehend.

B. He Knows All about Us and Will Someday Judge Us According to His Word

Psalms 139:1-4

You know all about me; you know my thoughts, all the things I do, and everything I say (before I say it).

Hebrews 4:12-13

The word of God is living and active; it judges the thoughts and intentions of the heart. Everything in all creation is visible to God. And we will someday give account of our lives to him.

C. God's Thoughts Have Been Made Known to Us (Some of Them)

Amos 4:13

The LORD God Almighty, the Creator and Ruler, has revealed his thoughts to people.

Comments & Questions:

- There is much we don't understand about God and the way he does things. There is much in which we need to simply trust him to do things in a way that is right and best for us. One of the themes in the book of Job is the wisdom and power of God, contrasting it to our weakness and lack of understanding. If God were described as "light," we would be described as "darkness." Everything about him is so much greater than we will ever comprehend!
- Yet he reveals some of his thoughts and actions to us - in creation (indirectly) and in the Word (directly). He tells us everything we need to know about ourselves and about how we should live - both now and in eternity. There are many things in life we can't fully comprehend, but we can know (through the Scriptures) everything we need for life and godliness!

- There are many ways in which God is different from us. Think about a few of them, and what these differences mean to you.
- Think about the greatness of God's wisdom and knowledge. How can God's greatness be a comfort and an encouragement to you? Under what conditions might his greatness be a cause for fear? (This last question may or may not apply to you.)
- What impact does the greatness of God's wisdom and knowledge have on your faith (belief or trust) in him? Are there instances in which nothing makes sense in your life? What do you do then? Have there been instances in which nothing made sense, or everything went wrong, but you later saw how God was using those things to accomplish good in your life (as described in Romans 8:28-30)? If you have seen God work this way in the past, how can your awareness of God's *past* works influence your thoughts about the *present* or the *future*?