

PART 10 –A SHORT TRIP FROM ZORAH TO GAZA

PART 1 – WHAT TO CHANGE

In our last study we addressed the fact that God wants us to love Him with all of our “**MIND**”. We saw that He wants us to think, to analyze, to reason, to meditate on His truth. Stated another way, the Christian life **REQUIRES** and **MANDATES** that we think – that we think **before** something happens, that we think **after** something happens, that we think about our **daily activities**, that we think about what is **important** and what is **unimportant**, that we think about what **pleases or displeases** God. This is what a godly mind does – it thinks. I love this aspect of the Christian life. I love this challenge to my life. Why? It is because God wants me to figure out how to live, what kind of choices to make, how to treat people, how to talk to people, and especially how to love Him with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength. So often Christians are characterized as “non-thinkers”, as people who just follow a rule book, but honestly, for a committed Christian, nothing could be any further from the truth. Listen carefully.

You cannot be a godly person without a godly mind.

That is an **impossible position** – to think that you can be godly, but never think godly. **A righteous life demands a righteous mind.**

I want you to think of thinking godly, or thinking like God thinks, as a very real **process**. It does not come naturally to the natural man or to the spiritual man. The Christian can ignore God just as much as the lost man. That is why the New Testament teaches that we have to “**put off**” certain things and “**put on**” certain things. You have to think about what is right and what is wrong, what is godly and what is ungodly, then how to ensure that your life fully reflects what is godly. The problem that so many people suffer from is that their thinking is literally backwards from what it should be. Think of it this way.

Things which matter the most should never be at the mercy of things which matter the least.¹

Just as one simple example, people spend hours and hours playing video games, but then completely ignore the Word of God as if they do not have enough time to even read it. So, in essence, the eternal things which matter the most in life are at the mercy of a video game. In light of eternity, does that make sense to you? It makes no sense to me at all. It could be anything that absorbs our attention – a hobby, some weekend recreational sport, or just being lazy and indifferent to spiritual things in our life.

So, what I want to do this morning is to begin by creating a kind of “mental” picture of what God says about this idea of making Him subservient to what really has no eternal value. **If ever there was a critical area where we need to “embrace change”, this has to be it** – this really bad choice with its subsequent bad habits of taking that which is critical to all of life and all of eternity and making it secondary and subordinate to our own ideas of what is important. If you are prone to give little to no attention to the amazing truths of God, then your life and your thinking needs to change. You are headed towards a spiritual tragedy in your life. You need a spiritual paradigm shift. Be assured that God will not force you to believe in Him or to even trust Him. He will not keep twisting your arm to make sure that you get everything right. What God has done is that He has given you two things that you **must embrace**.

¹ Covey, 155.

1. **First, God has given you His Word.** His Word contains His truth, His principles. They are right, they are good, and they will always guide you and strengthen you as you yield and submit your life to them. They will never lead you astray. They will never deceive you. They will always perform God’s perfect work in your life as you choose to trust them.
2. **Secondly, God has given you a MIND that is able to think.** You can analyze, you can evaluate, you can choose. You have to make the choice that you will follow Christ and that you will live for Christ, and that you will choose His will over your will. You have to think through what life really is and why you are even here. You have to think through why you were even created and what God wants to accomplish in your life. You should always be thinking **with the end in mind** so that you never give preference to other things that you allow to replace God’s truth.

Now, this morning, the way that I want to approach this is to read two passages in [Romans 1](#) that tell us exactly how God holds each of us accountable to what and how we think, to what choices we make, and to what habits we develop in our life. The first passage is [Romans 1:20-21](#).

Ro 1:20 (NKJV) For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse,²¹ because, although they knew God, they did not glorify *Him* as God, nor were thankful, but BECAME futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

Now, if you read this properly, what is described here is a process. The **first part** of this process begins in v20 where **people ignore the obvious**. God’s creation and His invisible attributes are described as being “**clearly seen**”. This is the Greek verb “*kathorao*” and it means to behold something fully and clearly.² This verb is in the present tense which simply means that day after day after day people are confronted with the glory of God and with His invisible attributes in His creation. I.e., they are always seeing what God has done, what God has created. What we see in creation is not some accident that happened billions of years ago and has slowly evolved. If you believe in the “Big Bang” theory, or that you have evolved from some kind of primordial slime, then you have a lot more faith than I do. I do not have enough faith to believe that, nor should you. To think that creation came from an explosion is actually stupid. Creation is not an accident. Creation had to have a Creator. This verb for “**clearly seen**” is also in the indicative mood which means that it is a fact that these things are “**clearly**” evident. Someone can deny and ignore the obvious all they want, but that will not change what is “**clearly seen**”. Listen carefully. This is super important. **You cannot change reality**. Just because someone “**says**” that they do not believe in God or in the fact that He created everything from nothing, in no way changes the reality that He both exists and that He is the Creator. Nothing can change that reality. God is there, He is not silent, and He has spoken. He has spoken through His Word, through His creation, and most importantly through His Son. Listen to [Hebrews 1:1-2](#),

Heb 1:1 (NKJV) God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets,² has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds;

You simply cannot change this reality. This is what God has done, and it is obvious and “**clearly seen**”.

² Strong, *kathorao*, #2529, ep.

The second part of the process is that (1) once you begin to ignore the obvious, then (2) the more “**futile**” that you “**become**” in your “**thoughts**”, or in how you think. You find foolish reasons not to place your trust in Christ, ways to doubt His Word, and reasons as to why you are the exception to what God says. Those are very bad choices and speak clearly of the futility of how both the natural man and the ignorant man think. So, why does Paul say that they became “**futile**” in their “**thoughts**”? It is because of v21 which says “**although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful**”. (1) They ignored the obvious, and in the process (2) they refused to “**glorify**” God in their life. They simply chose “**their things**” over “**God’s things**”. That is a really bad choice – to think that our little 3-pound brain that is 70% water and no bigger than a grapefruit is smarter than God. All that does is lead to utter vanity and futility in a person’s life. Listen carefully. Write this down.

Everything you do becomes vain and worthless when you ignore God.

The word “**futile**” literally means to become vain, to become destitute of God’s wisdom, and the result is that the person begins to act foolishly, perversely, and to make really bad choices in their life.³ This futility always begins in the person’s “**thoughts**”. Think of it this way.

To guard your life, you have to guard your mind.

If and when you ignore the obvious things of God in your life, all it reveals is that you do not know how to think properly. Here is what we know.

Bad thinking leads to bad choices which lead to bad habits which lead to bad consequences.

Now, for me personally, the most important word in v21 is “**became**” – “**they became futile in their thoughts**”. Becoming futile in your thoughts is not something that just happens in a day. The word “**became**” represents bad choices that took place over an extended period of time. Think of it this way.

Choosing to not think godly is a process, a simple progression of vain thoughts.

Let me illustrate. Do you remember the story of Samson, or maybe I should ask do you know how many steps it takes to walk 25 miles. It takes approximately 56,250 steps. 25 miles is the approximate distance from Zorah to Gaza. Why is that important? Well, listen to [Judges 16:1](#).

Jdg 16:1 (NKJV) **Now Samson went to Gaza and saw a harlot there, and went in to her.**

This is a picture of a progression of bad choices – “went, saw, went in”. Each of these represent bad thinking that led to bad choices that led to bad results. To begin with, Gaza was a town of the Philistines who were the enemies of Israel, but Samson lived in the town of Zorah which was approximately 25 miles from Gaza, or about 56,250 steps. Obviously, he had been thinking about doing this for some time. Unfortunately, he had no idea where his life was headed because of his bad choices, but trust me, this was the beginning of the end for Samson. We all know how this story ends and how he lost his eyesight and was bound in chains and worked at a grinding mill up until the day of his death. He had made many bad choices along the way. He touched the dead carcass of the lion, and in so doing he broke his Nazarite vow. The honey in the dead carcass of the lion was nothing but a test. Next, he chose to go to Gaza and of all things, he went in to a prostitute. Then later, he met and was seduced by Delilah and eventually told her about his hair. His hair did not have any supernatural strength to it, but it did represent

³ Zodhiates, *metaioo*, ep.

his commitment to his Nazarite vow. This was not just one mistake that he made, but a **progression** of mistakes of not thinking right. Just think of the 56,250 steps that he made going to Gaza and all of the wrong thoughts that he must have had in his mind to get to the place in which he found himself. “*Oh, I can compromise this, I can do this if I want to – no big deal. I’m Samson.*” What would we call all of this that led him to this place in his life? Listen carefully. **They were just little decisions and bad choices and they destroyed his life.** They were little things that deteriorated his relationship to God, and before you know it, everything in his life was totally out of control. **People never destroy their life and their relationships with other people all at once, but they do it little by little.**⁴ In fact, it seems to happen so inconsequentially that they never see what is coming until it is way too late.

The third part of this downward spiral or process is that “**their foolish hearts were darkened**”. The word “**darkened**” means that they became very ignorant of God and began to live in moral darkness.⁵ The word “**hearts**” refers to their “**minds**” being “**darkened**”. They followed this process and progression of ignoring the obvious in their life that they no longer had any capacity to even understand God’s truth. They no longer had any ability to discern between that which was right and that which was wrong, or what was good and what was evil. They lost perspective on anything about God, on everything that is eternal, and they developed bad habits that ultimately destroyed their life. People in this condition are not only in darkness, they are the darkness⁶ – void of morals, void of understanding, void of God, and having no desire to change. Here is the process again, so listen carefully.

1. **You begin ignoring the obvious.** You overlook, disregard, snub, pay no attention to, close your mind to, turn your back on truth that is actually staring you right in the face – “**clearly seen**”. When a lost man stands before God, he will not have any excuses that God will accept for his ignoring the obvious.
2. **Ignoring the obvious always leads you to thinking wrong.** Bad thinking always leads to bad decisions.
3. **Once you begin thinking wrong, you begin making bad choices and developing bad habits.** You live in spiritual “**darkness**” and do not even know it, and your “**heart becomes darkened**” to the things of God.

Listen to what Paul said you should do in [Colossians 3:1-3](#).

Col 3:1 (NKJV) **If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. ²set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. ³For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.**

“**Seek**” – Present tense, imperative mood, active voice. You are to always be doing this. You seek the things “**above**” with **your mind**. You use **your mind** to make godly choices that lead to godly results.

“**Set your mind**” - Present tense, imperative mood, active voice. You are to always be doing this. You are always to be setting your mind on what is above, what honors Christ, and you never stop evaluating what those things are in your life and how you reach that goal. You use **your mind** to do this.

⁴ Groeschel, *Power*, 140-141.

⁵ Zodiates, *skotizo*, ep.

⁶ Harris, *skotizomai*, #4509, ep.

This is your identity. V3 says that “**Your life is hidden with Christ in God**”. You are “**in Christ**”. This marks you out, this identifies you and who you are. Your identity should determine what you do, how you talk, how you live, what decisions you make, what kind of relationships you have, the habits you develop – and it all begins in **seeking with your mind** those things which are above and **setting your mind** on those things which are above. These verbs are in the active voice which means that they are **deliberate** choices that you make personally. They are intentional, thoughtful, careful, calculated thoughts that lead you to greater Christlikeness in your life. Look at **Romans 1:28** which says,

Ro 1:28 (NKJV) And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting;

This is a bad landing zone. If you are someone that does not like to retain God in your knowledge, in your heart, and in your mind, then God will simply **give you over** to what you want. That is not good. The people described in this verse simply did not want “**to retain God in their knowledge**”. They did not want to even think about God. They saw no reason to even acknowledge that they had a need for God in their life. They thought to themselves “*I am going to live the way that I want to live and everything will work out just great in the end.*” Good luck with that! That is simply the evidence of “**a foolish and darkened heart**”.

So, how can you know if you may have reached this place in your life? Well, it really is quite simple. You know what God’s Word says is right, but **you choose to ignore it**. You ignore it in your mind, and that leads you to choosing to ignore it in your life. You become no different than Samson in how you think. So, what did God do? Well, v28 says that He “**gave them over**” to a debased mind, debased thoughts, debased ideas, debased decisions, and to debased habits. He just let them do what they wanted to do. That is not a good place to find yourself. So, where do you start? Listen carefully. **YOU CHOOSE NOT TO IGNORE THE OBVIOUS**. That is exactly where you start. You choose God over everything else in your life – everything. It should be obvious that that is what you always want to do in your life – choose God above everything else in life. You will never regret that decision.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Covey, Stephen R. *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People: Powerful Lessons in Personal Change*. 25th Anniversary Edition. London: Simon and Schuster, 2004.

Groeschel, Craig. *The Power to Change: Mastering the Habits that Matter Most*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Books, 2023.

Harris, Ralph. W., ed. *The Complete Biblical Library: Greek English Dictionary*. Springfield, Missouri: World Library Press Inc., n.d.

Strong, James. *The New Strong’s Expanded Dictionary of Bible Words*. Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001.