

How Do You Think? *What Dominates Your Thinking?*

We have two cats, neither of which I would choose to stay in our house. They belong to our children and so I believe I am legally obligated to provide them food and not drop them off somewhere in the Sierra Nevada mountains. Many people around the world love cats and I do believe there is psychological counseling available for them. I saw something the other day that the cats were doing that puzzled me. They were cuddling with each other. Now I wondered what they were thinking as that took place. Were they sharing love with each other? Was there real affection being expressed as they lay on the floor? Whenever we see animals do things that look a lot like what people do, we run the risk of guessing the reason behind their actions are the same as the reasons behind the actions of people. What we do know is that the thinking of animals does not come close to matching the comprehension ability of human beings. Cognitive testing has proven that but here is something to consider. Is there a level of thinking people can reach that is as superior to normal thinking as the thinking of an average human in comparison to that of a cat? We are going to take a look at thinking from a Biblical perspective and how you can upgrade your ability to process everything. Our big idea is this: Think with God rather than just on your own.

Many claim the Bible is unsophisticated in the way it speaks of the heart. Here are a couple of examples of what critics deem uninformed. **Then I thought in my heart, "The fate of the fool will overtake me also. What then do I gain by being wise?" I said in my heart, "This too is meaningless."** (Ecclesiastes 2: 15 NIV) Those are of course the words of Solomon, named the wisest man in the whole earth and an expert on botany, zoology and biology. The apostles had a similar view of the heart. Peter, addressing a religious hypocrite, warned him, **"Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart."** (Acts 8 :22 NIV) Paul the Apostle contends that it is in the heart where attitudes and thoughts are held and formed. **For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.** (Hebrews 4: 12 NIV) What is more, Jesus Himself has the same view of the heart. **For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.** (Matthew 15: 19 NIV)

The Bible clearly locates the heart as the center of the person, of the personality. Who you are is found in the heart. The heart is who you are, and it stays you for eternity. When the body shuts down in death, the heart remains because you remain. Now, even with our advanced medical knowledge, we still say things like, "I love you with all my heart." "My heart is broken." "I left my heart in San Francisco". Has nearly the entire world become ignorant, unschooled illiterates? Of course not. We know that the pumping machine in the body is the heart. It is a biological work of art of amazing complexity. The brain is the machine where thoughts, emotions and memories are contained and when the body dies, the brain no longer works there. Does that mean you cease to exist? Of course it doesn't. The heart, as the Bible uses the term, continues...bodyless for a time until you receive your resurrection body. Statements like this in Proverbs are of course absurd or mere hyperbole if the heart doesn't remain you forever. **My son, keep your father's commands and do not forsake your mother's teaching. Bind them upon your heart forever; fasten them around your neck.** (Proverbs 6:20-21 NIV) This too in the Psalms. **I will praise you, O Lord my God, with all my heart; I will glorify your name forever.** (Psalm 86: 12 NIV) Solomon was no fool academically. He saw the heart as far more than a pumping bio-machine although he knew of the heart that way too. The heart is the term the Bible, including Jesus and Peter and Paul, used to speak of you and your personality...the you that is made in the image of God, the you that generates thoughts and ideas and interpretations of things.

That being said, consider carefully what the Lord tells us through the prophet Ezekiel. **I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. Then they will follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. They will be my people, and I will be their God.** (Ezekiel 11: 19-20 NIV) This may be one of the most profound declarations found anywhere on the psychological impact of being born again. God promises to make a complete and revolutionary transformation of the human heart. Just pause at the sort of metaphor the Lord uses. The heart will be converted by the supernatural work of God so that what was once a heart of stone will become a heart of flesh. The depths of this statement are impossible for me to plumb but let it suffice to say that as dramatic the difference between an inanimate object like a rock and a living being like you is the breadth of magnitude of the work God had planned. We know that the theory of evolution falls apart at this point. Without intelligence, supernatural intelligence at that, a "rock" cannot become a living entity of any sort. It

does not happen without intervention. Yet that sort of momentous evolution is just what God does; the making of one thing, a human heart into a completely different human heart, one with a new spirit, or Spirit.

The classic example of the heart of stone conversion into a heart of flesh is the account of the Apostle Paul. At one moment he was the leading player in having Christians arrested, imprisoned and executed and the next he was preaching the salvation of Christ and leading slews of people into Christian faith. What was different about his heart, his way of thinking, his personality. The historical record of Paul's life transformation tells us that two things happened. He put his faith in Jesus Christ as his Savior and the Holy Spirit became a part of him. Paul, who was originally named Saul experienced a supernatural transformation. **Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord-Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here — has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength.** (Acts 9: 17-19 NIV)

As soon as the Spirit of God, better known as the Holy Spirit, comes into you, it changes you and makes you a completely different species as such, a born again species of human being. And it is in your heart that God's work of change has its biggest impact. Let me give two examples. ...**God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.** (Romans 5: 5b NIV) This is a magnificent statement the Bible makes. God's very own love, both His capacity to love as well as the sort of love He possesses is poured into your heart by the Holy Spirit. Once you have been born again, when you put your faith in Jesus Christ for your complete salvation, you can never say again that you cannot love someone or cannot do it well. It is on you to put that love of God into action, making it function in its supernatural capacity. Your heart has in it, if you are born again the great power of God to love anyone you come across. Second, **Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts...** (Colossians 3: 15 NIV) Once more, when you are born again, you have in you the peace of Christ, His very own peace within you. You however have to decide how much impact it will have in your heart. If you don't want much peace but would rather be angry or worried or frustrated, then you can live that way. God says don't do that. Take that peace of Christ and give it power over your thoughts that run through your heart.

I want to illustrate just how powerful the Lord's thoughts are when they are worked into our heart by salvation. When Stephen, one of the original deacons was arrested on trumped up charges and forced to stand trial before the ruling body of the Jews, the Sanhedrin, he had to listen as false witnesses made up stories to try to prove he deserved the death penalty for blasphemy. Imagine the anger and maybe even fear welling up inside your heart as you knew it was all lies and no one there would defend you. With the peace of Christ ruling in his heart, Stephen boldly gave his defense...but it wasn't one that would be expected. He went through the Scriptures patiently from the beginning, starting with Abraham, showing how their ancestors had always resisted the work of God and the leading of the Holy Spirit. He wasn't finished. He ended his testimony by revealing to them the vision he was having at that moment of Jesus Christ standing in heaven at the right hand of the Father. That sent the Sanhedrin into an uproar and immediately Stephen was dragged out of the city to be stoned to death. But as he knelt, the stones flying up and destroying his body, he prayed, **"Lord, do not hold this sin against them."** (Acts 7: 60b CSB) What sort of person so peacefully and with such love in his heart would respond that way? One who has Christ living within, whose thoughts have been joined with the thoughts of God.

Why waste your time having just your thoughts directing your life. Wouldn't it be so much better if you keep your mind on Christ and let Him guide your thinking? Our big idea is this: Think with God rather than just on your own. The Psalmist gets it right. Everything may fall apart and the tragic nature of this life could get the best of you but with Christ in you, it truly is well with your soul. **My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.** (Psalm 73:26 NIV) With Christ in you, sorting out your thoughts and showing you the way to see everything, what can ever get the best of you?