

Personal Holiness - Part 5

by William MacDonald

The sermon emphasizes the importance of controlling our thoughts and disciplining our minds to live a life of personal holiness.

Duration: 35:33

Scripture: Romans 7:7, James 1:13

Topics: "Holiness"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of preaching about sin. He uses vivid imagery of the gas chambers, ovens, and barracks in a concentration camp to illustrate the consequences of sin. The preacher also discusses the power of thoughts and how they can lead to actions, habits, and ultimately determine one's destiny. He references the words of James and the importance of controlling one's thought life. The sermon concludes with a reminder of the grace of God and the potential of the human mind for good.

Transcript

This week we've been thinking about the subject of holiness, personal holiness in the Christian life. First we went over some of the areas in the Christian life with which holiness is associated. We thought of motives for holiness.

Why should we want to be holy? We went over some principles to guide us in Christian conduct. We talked about the Christian speech, and I think it was yesterday morning, I lose track of time, I think we talked about Christian ethics. Yesterday morning.

Tonight I'd like to speak with you about the Christian thought life. Before we get into it, I'd like you to do something. I'd like you to picture in your mind Calvary and the Lord Jesus hanging there and dying for you.

And I'd like you to transfer your thoughts to tomorrow around noon when you're getting ready to leave on the trip back home. And I'd like you to transfer yourself, picture yourself skiing, water skiing out on Lake Koronas. And then transfer your thoughts again to the resurrection of Christ that we just heard about in the song.

We've just proved something. We've proved that we can control our thoughts, right? We can control what we think. And I think that's a very basic lesson to learn.

Control of the thought life is basic. It says in Proverbs 23, 7, As he thinketh, so is he. You know, this is a good illustration of how we take a verse out of its context, and yet I think it's quite legitimate to do it.

Would you turn to Proverbs? Proverbs 23, verse 7. Proverbs 23. I'm going to go back a few verses and read. Actually, it's describing a miser here.

And you're sitting at the miser's table, and you're eating some of his food, and he grudges you every bite you take. Proverbs 23, it says, verse 6, Eat not thou the bread of him that hath an evil eye, neither desire thou his dainty meat. For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he.

Eat and drink saith he to thee, but his heart is not with thee. The more so which thou hast eaten, shalt thou vomit up and lose thy sweet word. So you're really, you have a miser as a host, and he tells you with his words to eat, but he's thinking of the enormous grocery bill that he has as a result of your eating.

And so it says, As he thinketh in his heart, so is he. And it's applying to a miser, but really you can take that out and apply it as a principle in life, and it is true. As a man thinketh, so is he.

It has been often said, You are not what you think you are, but what you think you are. And what it's really saying is that the thought life is the well from which our actions flow. And if you can control the well or the spring, you can control all your behavior.

Proverbs chapter 4 and verse 23 says, Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life. And when it says heart there, it doesn't mean the organ that pumps the blood. It means the whole inwardness of man, and it certainly includes his mind.

And although I think the heart here means more than the mind, just limit it to the mind this evening. Keep your mind with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life. Control the source, and you control the stream.

It's interesting to me that when the Lord gave ten commandments to the people of Israel, one of them had to do with the thought life. Thou shalt not covet. Where does coveting take place? It takes place in the mind.

If you don't entertain the thought, the action of covetousness won't follow. And interestingly enough, in Romans, Paul says that that's the commandment that slew him. And I think I can understand that because Paul was outwardly, in his own mind at least, a very righteous person.

He was not only righteous, he was very religious. And he speaks of himself as concerning the law, blameless. And that means that whenever he transgressed the law, he brought the offering that was required by the law.

He was really careful in all of those details. But then this commandment, thou shalt not covet, came home to him in power. And he realized something of his thought life.

And that really zapped him. I had a similar experience in my own life. I was brought up in a very protective environment.

And through no choice of my own, was separated from the grosser sins of the world. And yet, when I was 18 years of age, I went through tremendous conviction of sin. Like the five-year-old boy, they asked him what his favorite hymn was, and he said, years I spent in fantasy and pride.

But when I was 18, the Lord made a tremendous revelation to me. The Spirit of God came and showed me that what I was inwardly, was a lot worse than anything I had ever done. So that's what made me in a hurry to be saved.

When God revealed my thoughts and motives to me, I knew that no one like that could ever go to heaven. And so I can understand Paul saying that when the law came to him, especially this commandment, thou shalt not covet, it really did him in. James describes the connection between the thought life and actions.

Turn in your Bibles please to James chapter 1 and verses 13 through 15. James chapter 1 verse 13. Let no man say when he is tempted, that I'm tempted of God, for God cannot be tempted of evil, neither tempted he any man.

But every man is tempted when he's drawn away of his own lust. It really means appetite, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin.

And sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. And James is really likening here our thought life with the whole process of life, beginning with the conception of a baby, the birth of a baby, the growth of that baby into manhood, and the death of that person. And what he's saying is, a thought comes into your mind, you say, oh, I'd rather like that.

You say, oh, I think I'll just entertain that thought for a while. And you do. And not only do you entertain it that day, but it becomes a fact of your life.

And James is saying here, if you think about a thing long enough, sooner or later, you're going to do it. And that's really a tremendous psychology of sin. It really is.

Nobody just sins really off the top of his head. He first of all lives in a fantasy world. He incubates the sin in his mind.

Then he actually goes out and indulges in it, and pretty soon that road leads to death. Somebody has said, so a thought and reap an act. So an act and reap a habit.

So a habit and reap a character. So a character and reap a destiny. And I think that little saying is the replay of the words of James 1. It begins with a thought.

It goes on to an act. It becomes a habit, and it determines your destiny. Thank God, the grace of God can intervene and deliver us from it.

The Lord Jesus emphasized the importance of the thought life. A very crucial passage is found in Mark chapter seven. The seventh chapter of Mark verses fourteen through twenty three.

Mark seven, verse fourteen. And when he had called all the people unto him, he said to them, Hearken unto me, every one of you, and understand there's nothing from without a man that entering into him can defile him. The things that come out of the man, those are they that defile the man.

If any man have ears to hear, let him hear. And when he was entered into the house from the people, his disciples asked him concerning the parable. And he said unto them, Are you so without understanding? Also, do you not perceive that whatsoever thing from without interest into the man, it cannot defile him because it enters not into his heart, but into the belly and goeth out in the draft.

And then modern versions change the last part of the verse that this, he said, making all neat, clean. And he said that which comes out of the man that defile of the man for within out of the heart of man proceeds evil thoughts, adultery, fornication, murders, theft, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile the man.

In order to understand this passage, it's good to remember that the Lord Jesus is speaking to Jewish disciples brought up under the law of Moses. And under the law of Moses, certain foods they ate defiled them. That means it made them ceremonially unclean.

That means they couldn't go to the temple to worship to the tabernacle or to the temple to worship until they had been ceremonially clean. They couldn't eat crab Louie. They couldn't eat shrimp cocktail.

They couldn't eat pork in any form. The food that entered into them defiled them. Now the Lord Jesus is announcing a great dispensational change here.

And it really must have come as enormous shock to these disciples. He said now he really just waves aside that whole legal dispensation. And he says, look, it isn't what goes into your mouth that defiles you.

It's what comes out of your heart. And once again, when he says heart, it doesn't mean the heart as we think of it. It means from inside you.

And it certainly includes the mind. That's very good. Very good.

And then he goes on to list for those things that are hatched in the mind. Evil thoughts, adultery, fornication, murders, theft, covetousness. It's interesting, isn't it? Murder takes place in the mind before it takes place on the street.

And all the rest of those sins that the Lord Jesus catalog there. The Lord also emphasizes in the Sermon on the Mount. You might turn back to Matthew chapter five, verse twenty one.

Matthew five, twenty one. He says, you have heard that it was said by them of old time, thou shalt not kill and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment. But I say to you that whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment.

Whosoever shall say to his brother, Racka, shall be in danger of the council. Whosoever shall say thou fool shall be in danger of hell fire. And then it says also in verse twenty seven, you have heard that it was said by them of old time, thou shalt not commit adultery.

But I say unto you that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her has committed adultery with her already in his heart. So what the Lord is saying is, don't think hatred because hatred is murder in embryo. And it really is.

That's the way murder starts, by hatred in the human mind. And he says, control that mind, don't allow that hatred to come in, you'll never commit the act. And he says the same thing with regard to immorality.

Don't think the lustful thought and you won't commit it. You often hear people excusing sinful thoughts. They say, well, you can't stop the birds from flying over your head, but you can stop them from making a nest in your hair, something like that.

And that almost makes it, I worry about that because it almost makes it sound that sinful thoughts aren't so bad. But all the emphasis I get from these verses of scripture that the very thoughts are sin. The very thoughts are defiling.

Well, Jesus said that. He said what comes out of the heart that defiles a man. And John in his first epistle equates hatred with murder.

He said he that hateth his brother is a murderer. You say, well, don't send him to the electric chair for that. No, you don't.

But what John is saying is that's where it all begins. Begins in the mind of a person. A mind of man is really a marvelous thing, a marvelous mechanism, isn't it? Something that evolution has never been able to explain and will never be able to explain.

It's something that all the computers that man can make will never be able to duplicate either. The mind of man is like the general headquarters of an army. And that's where all the instructions go out.

That's where I decide what's going to happen. And I think the Bible makes it very clear that we, you and I, are responsible for what we think. I think too often we just shift our minds into neutral and let them just wander the mistake.

I do it. It's a mistake. I should learn to discipline my mind.

Think with me tonight of the potential of the human mind for good. I often think of Handel and his composition of the music for the Messiah. I don't think any music was ever so wedded to words as that music.

I wouldn't be surprised if we have it in heaven. Isn't that wonderful? All the words are the words of Scripture and we'll certainly have them in heaven, won't we? And maybe we'll have that music too. There never was a marriage like that, I don't think.

In the realm of music, as the wedding of the words and the music to Handel's Messiah. Think of that man sitting there and writing out that music. Thrilling to me.

Here he is, he got out of Rome and went to a church called St. Peter and James. And there there's a statue of Moses done by Michelangelo. And I am a real lowbrow as far as art is concerned.

I've never had any appreciation. That is of course an art appreciation. I stood there in front of that statue absolutely speechless.

How a man could take a chunk of marble and work away with a chisel and a mallet. Is that what they use? Chisel and a mallet. And pretty soon the face of a man emerges.

And before he's through, those veins on the hands of Moses are all visible. I don't know how you do that with marble. But I think it's a marvelous thing to realize that before that statue ever existed in reality, it existed in Michelangelo's mind.

Isn't that wonderful? He saw it there. Before it ever became an actuality. I think of a man like Isaac Watts.

One day he sat down to write a hymn for use at the communion service. And he penned those words, When I survey the wondrous cross on which the young prince of glory died. Because that's the way he wrote it.

My richest gain I count but loss, and poor contempt on all my prize. Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast save in the cross of Christ my Lord. All the vain things that charm me most, I sacrifice them to his blood.

And then he engaged in a beautiful piece of what I would call poetic license. He said, see from his head, his hands and feet, sorrow and love flowed mingled down. Actually it was blood and water that flowed mingled down.

But by a beautiful form of poetic transference, he changed the blood and the water to sorrow and love. Flowed mingled down. Did air such love as sorrow meet our thorns composed so rich a crown? And by that time he had contemplated the wondrous cross so thoroughly that he said, Were the whole realm of nature mine, that were an offering far too small.

If I owned the whole planet and everything on it, it would be too small an offering to give to the Lord. Were the whole realm of nature mine, that were an offering far too small. Love, so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.

To me it's one of the greatest hymns that was ever written. The potential of the human mind for good. It's an amazing thing, isn't it? I have a man named Charles Hadley Spurgeon.

And he said that when he gave his life to the Lord Jesus, he gave it all to the Lord Jesus. He gave him his life, his body, and all that would ever come from it for time and from eternity. For eternity.

And I think it was F.B. Meyer that said of him, Of all the talents that God gave him, of all the gifts that God gave him, he made the very most. Called a prince of preachers. I suppose it's seldom a week that goes by that we don't quote something that he says.

Because he disciplined his mind and it was under the control of the Spirit of God. I love some of the things he said. A lie can go around the world while truth is putting its boots on.

You know, what a way to express something. He did it in a way that you do never forget it. I think of man in our own generation.

I think of these men that fly to the moon. You know, what a marvelous achievement of the human mind to figure it all out. To be able to come back to earth and land within a mile of the planned spot.

I still look up at the moon at night and gasp when I think of it. We celebrate Columbus Day. I tell you, the flight to the moon was a lot more important than Columbus Day.

We don't celebrate that. But then I think also of the capacity of the human mind for evil. I think of Hitler.

A man named Adolf Hitler, rising to power. And before he was through with his monstrous crusade, he had eliminated 20 million people. That included 6 million Jews, a third of all the Jewish population in the world.

I visited Auschwitz, one of the concentration camps a few years ago, and it's just the way it was, except that it's cleaned up a little. I was in Warsaw, Poland, and a Baptist minister said to me, are you going to Auschwitz? And I said, I wasn't planning to. He said, well, you ought to go.

And I said, why should I go? And he said, if you went, you'd preach about sin the way you never preached about it before. And, you know, after I went, I realized what he was talking about. There were the gas chambers, and there were the ovens, and there were the barracks with the beds, three-tier beds, and four people slept on each bed, not on each tier, on each bed.

If one died during the night, you'd hear the body falling off on the floor, and three people had that bed for the rest of the night. And outside was a courtyard, and there's a bell there. The bell is still there, and when they rang that bell, everybody had to appear, summer or winter.

They were just wearing light cotton clothing, like pajamas, really. They had to go out and answer roll call, and the longest roll call lasted 19 hours in the dead of winter. The trucks came and picked up the bodies.

The capacity of the human mind for evil. I think of men like Voltaire and Ingersoll and Tom Paine, men created in the image and after the likeness of God, and they take that mind and they just turn it over to the evil one and spend their lives trying to destroy the faith of men and women, and young men and young women. The capacity of the human mind for evil.

I think of peddlers of pornography today, peddlers of filth and smut, but I think of my own mind too. I think of my own mind and how if I want I can wander down evil back alleys. Many people today groan of besetting sins.

They want deliverance, but they don't want to discipline their mind to find. John the Baptist said the axe must be laid to the root of the tree. First of all, an unsafe person, the way to do it is to be born again, isn't it? That's step number one.

That's what had to come in my life when God revealed to me the inwardness of my life. It was a terrible revelation, and I came to him and found cleansing and forgiveness. What does a Christian do? Well, I think the first thing we do is take the whole matter to the Lord in prayer.

Lord, I have a wandering mind. I have a mind that's prone to wander and prone to be occupied with not only evil things, but trivia and all the rest. There's a nice prayer for us in Psalm 51, verse 10.

It says, Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. I'll never forget when we were kids. A visitor came to our house once and brought two little wall plaques.

They weren't any bigger than that. And my brother's plaque was, How shall we escape if we neglect the great salvation? And mine was, Create in me a clean heart, O God. But I believe God died even in things like that.

The second thing we should do is when thoughts come to our mind, we should judge them as in the presence of Christ. Now, this is very, very practical. First of all, I'll read the verse, 2 Corinthians 10, verse 5. 2 Corinthians 10, verse 5. It says, Casting down imaginations, and I think some versions, casting down human reasonings and every high thought that exalts itself against the knowledge of God and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.

I like that. Bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ. Let me give you an illustration.

Here I'm walking along the street, and an unworthy thought enters my mind. Practically speaking, how do I bring that into captivity and obedience to Christ? Well, this is the way I would do it. Lord, that was sin.

I confess it in your presence, and I reject it. To me, that's how I personally bring thoughts into captivity to the obedience of Christ. You and I have the whip hands in all of this.

We're the ones that control it. And I think that's what we must come to is when these thoughts come to us, don't just, as John was saying today, sweep them under the carpet, but call the wretched thing by its name in the presence of God. Judge it in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ and say it's sin.

It's defiling. I reject it. I will not entertain it in my life.

That means confessing every sinful thought instantly and expelling it. How do you expel it? By introducing something worthy. God never wants us to have a blank mind, does he? He never wants us to have a vacant mind.

That's dangerous. When we expel the evil thought, we should start thinking about something positive. Proverbs 28.3 says that the one who confesses and forsakes shall have mercy.

And then learn to think positively. I'm preaching to myself tonight. Learn to think positively.

But we all with unveiled faith. 2 Corinthians 3.18. But we all with unveiled faith. Beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

That says I should be occupied with Christ. That says the more I'm occupied with Christ, the more I'll become like him. I've learned one thing in life, and that is I can't think about sin and Jesus at the same time.

I've got to make a choice. Can you? Can you think about sin and Jesus at the same time? No, they don't go together. They're not moral correlative.

So the trick is to think more about Jesus. Now, keep your mind clean and pure. The power of positive thinking.

Philippians 4.8. Now, there's such a thing in the Bible as the power of positive thinking. And here you have it in Philippians 4.8. Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue and if there be any praise, think on these things. Then I think we have to exercise discipline over what we read, what we see, our friendships, and every other aspect of our lives because our thought processes are involved with them.

Now, I grant you that sometimes you see things that are unworthy, and you can't help seeing it. You know, the subways in London and some of the advertising there is practically pornographic, and you can't help seeing it. You don't have to feast on it.

You don't have to feed on it, and you can reject it and think about the Lord. And then finally, I think we can keep busy for the Lord. There's tremendous safety and sanctification in a life poured out in diligent service for the Lord Jesus.

Remember the story of David at the time when kings go to war. David didn't go to war. He stayed home, and his eyes began to wander, and his spotlight became corrupt.

And the process described in James actually took place, and it ended in death. It ended in adultery, and it ended in murder. I think the times of greatest temptation in our lives are the times when we're overfed and overflet and idle.

I hate idleness. I really do. So the point is to keep busy for the Lord.

And then as we're occupied with him, increasingly in our lives, we'll become more and more conformed to his image. If I could only have one verse on holiness in the New Testament, I think that's the one I'd choose. 2 Corinthians 3, verse 28.

Without that, I couldn't go very far. May the Lord help us in the days ahead more and more to discipline our minds and to use them to the hilt in a positive way for the Lord Jesus Christ. This is part of the highway to holiness, shall we pray.

Father, we do thank you for your precious word. We thank you for how it puts the finger right on the trouble spot. And we thank you that it doesn't leave us there, but leads us on to the way of victory.

We thank you, Lord, for this revelation that each of us is a ruler ruling over the kingdom of the mind. Help us, Lord, to be worthy in that. Help us to put aside those things that are sinful and defiling.

Help us to fill our minds with the things concerning Christ and his kingdom, that our lives might count for you and that we might be delivered from falling into sin. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

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