

Fulton County Gospel News

Good News About Christ And His Church For All Of The World

“. . . Christ is the head of the church: and He is the Savior of the body.” - Ephesians 5:23

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DO YOU BELIEVE THE BIBLE?

by Farrell Nicholson

The question, “Do you believe the Bible?”, while not uttered explicitly in Scripture, is certainly not without Scriptural precedent. Paul turned the tables on his interrogators by asking Agrippa II, “*King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you do believe*” (Acts 26:27, NKJV). In other words, did the temporal king of the Jewish state believe the Old Testament prophecies of Jesus Christ, the Messiah? Or conversely, we can hear this question in its declarative sense within Paul’s rebuke to the Jews of Pisidian Antioch:

Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses. Beware therefore, lest that come upon you, which is spoken of in the prophets; Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish: for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you (Acts 13:38-41, emphasis FN).

We again hear the question in his and Barnabas’s address a week later:

But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with jealousy, and contradicted the things which were spoken by Paul, and blasphemed. And Paul and Barnabas spake out boldly, and said, It was necessary that the word of God

should first be spoken to you. Seeing ye thrust it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles (verses 45-46, ASV, emph. FN).

The Jews apparently did not believe “their own” Scriptures, the Old Testament (To the Jews, Jesus twice referred to the law of Moses as “your law,” John 8:17, 10:34).

But what about Christians? Those who have purport to “*delight [themselves] in the law of God after the inward man*” (Romans 7:22), who have “*the implanted word*” (James 1:21, ASV) instilled within their hearts? (Hebrews 8:10). What of those who “*have put off the old man with his deeds*” (Colossians 3:9b), and upon whom the name of Christ has been affixed? (Acts 15:17). Do we believe the Bible?

We preach that people are, through Christ, to “*put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them. But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth*” (Colossians 3:5-8, NKJV); but yet too often (Paul affirms that even once is too much—Ephesians 5:3), Christians are engaged in the very crimes against God delineated in Holy Writ. In our hypocritical putting on of masks (1 Thessalonians 2:5: “*a cloak,*” or a pretense meant to hide ulterior motives),

many of us have merited the scathing denunciation of God’s spokesman to Jewish brethren of old: “*You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal? You who say, “Do not commit adultery,” do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law?*” (Romans 2:21-23, NKJV).

Have we saints ceased believing God requires us to endeavor “*to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*”? (Ephesians 4:3). The call for unity within the body of Christ is as clarion in the 21st century as it was in the 1st. Do we no longer believe in hell? Even though the Savior, the omniscient purveyor of glad tidings, gave a more complete portrayal of Gehenna than He revealed the ineffable climes of Heaven, have we stopped reading passages such as Mark 9:43-48? Hell never ceased being real, yet it is as though we have drifted off into moral and religious slumber. To sleep portends spiritual death (1 Corinthians 11:30; Ephesians 5:14; 1 Thessalonians 5:6-9). Finally, has the siren song of the world so diluted the parameters of marriage that we find ourselves living out the antithesis of God’s will? (Ephesians 5:22-25, Hebrews 13:4). Would to God we could wake up from this spectral nightmare!!

Yet, amidst the ensuing chaos and pervading noise of the battle, we can hear the simple answer, if we will but listen: “*remember thy first love*” (Revelation 2:4-5), “*abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good*” (Romans 12:9), and “*take up [your] cross daily, and follow me*” (Luke 9:23). Only those who vigilantly respond in kind to the Scriptures’ entreaties are those who can justly assert they believe

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the Bible (Romans 2:13; James 1:22). However, our compliance or noncompliance with the dictates of our Law (1 Corinthians 9:21; James 1:25, 2:12, 4:12) in no way negates its authenticity, for Paul affirms, *“If we deny him, he also will deny us: If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself”* (2 Timothy 12b-13). Do you believe the Bible? Not if, by hiding behind a mask, you despise or willfully neglect its power in your life and its rule over your behavior. In the inimitable words of the late Marshall Keeble, *“The Bible is right; it is right if everyone believes it, it is right if no one believes it; every man could die and go to hell, but the Bible would still be right.”* To this agree the words of an apostle: *“yea, let God be true, but every man a liar”* (Romans 3:4b) and, *“Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity”* (2 Timothy 2:19).

Mammoth Spring, AR

THINK ON *THESE* THINGS

by Lee Moses

One can scarcely overstate the importance of one’s thoughts. One’s thoughts define one’s character: *“For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he”* (Proverbs 23:7). This verse has been paraphrased, *“You’re not what you think you are, but what you think—you are.”* As Marcus Aurelius astutely observed, *“As are thy habitual thoughts, so will be the character of thy mind, for the soul is dyed the color of its thoughts.”*

The meditations of one’s mind can cause him to become *“like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper”* (Psalm 1:3). One’s thoughts can also keep him from doing what is most needed (2 Kings 5:11), and one’s thoughts can cause his destruction (2 Samuel 4:10). *“O Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved. How long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee?”* (Jeremiah 4:14).

Our thoughts dictate our character, our actions, our lives, and ultimately our standing with God, both now and in the hereafter. Thus, Solomon exhorts, *“Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life”* (Proverbs 4:23). The marginal reading of this verse is *“Keep thy heart above all keeping.”* We need guard no earthly possession so closely as we guard the thoughts of our minds.

The modern world does not make this an easy task. We are continually bombarded with images, conduct, and speech around us that force us to think, at least periodically, upon things which are not becoming of saints (compare with Ephesians 5:3). And if we dwell upon these thoughts, they will corrupt our morals (compare with 1 Corinthians 15:33). But the Holy Spirit equips saints with *“thought-filters”* in Scripture:

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 (Philippians 4:8).

If our mind is to dwell upon¹ anything, it must meet the criteria of being *“true,”* or in accordance with fact;² *“honest,”* or honorable and worthy; *“just,”* or righteous; *“pure”;* *“lovely,”* or eliciting a response of love;³ and *“of good report,”* or winning and attractive.⁴ More generally, these things must be of *“virtue,”* or moral excellence, and praise-worthy. Paul writes this with the assumption that there are indeed things having moral excellence; there are indeed things worthy of praise on which to think.⁵

Although we may be inundated with sensual and otherwise unhealthy thoughts in the world, we yet have a plethora of virtuous and praiseworthy things on which to think.

Think on the Law of the Lord

The law of the Lord is the beginning place for right thinking: *“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction”* (Proverbs 1:7). Of the blessed and fruitful man of Psalm 1, it is written, *“his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night”* (Psalm 1:2). This was true for those under the Old Testament, but it is especially true now that mankind has the law of Christ: *“But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better*

covenant, which was established upon better promises” (Hebrews 8:6).

In the law of the Lord, we learn about the attributes of God. Some of these attributes can be determined through nature (Psalm 19:1; Isaiah 40:26; Romans 1:20). However, His attributes come into far greater clarity through Scripture. We need to think about His power as revealed in Scripture (Psalm 33:5ff). This will remind us of His ability to aid His children and of the fierceness of His judgment to come, thus providing assurance in trials and incentive against wrongdoing. We need to think about His love and grace as revealed in Scripture (Romans 5:1-2, 6-8). This provides motivation to love God in return (1 John 4:19), and to love others—including our enemies (Matthew 5:43-48; 7:7-12). Indeed, it is through understanding Scripture that we can come to God (John 6:44-45).

Not only can we come to better grasp of the attributes of God by thinking upon His law, we can grasp what things are truly important (Matthew 6:33; 16:26). We can understand our purpose in life (Ecclesiastes 12:13). We can be mindful of the final destination for which we aim (Hebrews 13:14; Revelation 21:1-22:5). As we embed the teachings of Scripture in every fold of our minds, we enable ourselves to please our Creator and avoid displeasing Him (Psalm 119:11).

Again, the law of the Lord is the beginning place for right thinking. How can one **know** what else is “true” and “pure,” and thus suitable to think on? The law of the Lord **defines** what things meet these criteria (Psalm 119:160; Proverbs 30:5).

Think on Marriage and Family

Marriage and family certainly pass through the “thought-filters” of Philippians 4:8. God ordained and sanctioned this institution until the Lord comes again (Genesis 2:18-24; Mark 10:6-9). Men and women have sexual drives that are wholly appro-

priate when directed toward one’s spouse (1 Corinthians 7:2-5). However, Satan and his minions seek to redirect and pervert such urges. He knows that if he can get Christians to look longingly upon a cheerleader in a skimpy outfit, or to desire sexual affection outside of marriage, he has them where he wants them. He knows this is the door that leads to fornication and adultery. He knows such thoughts alone, if dwelt upon, cause one to commit “*adultery with her already in his heart*” (Matthew 5:28).

Job knew the importance of not looking upon women or thinking of them this way: “*I made a covenant with mine eyes; why then should I think upon a maid?*” (Job 31:1). He knew that, were he to do so, he would sin against God and lose his hope of heavenly inheritance (verse 2; compare with Genesis 39:7-10). Of the wicked seductive woman, Solomon warns, “*Lust not after her beauty in thine heart; neither let her take thee with her eyelids*” (Proverbs 6:25).

The thoughts of our hearts guard us from committing such sins. Certainly, thoughts of God and His promises can work to this end. So can thoughts of marriage and family. Like Job, we “make a covenant with our eyes” when we are married. We promise to “forsake all others,” and we need to keep that promise at the forefront of our minds. Should one be tempted to commit an act of extramarital lust, he should remember “the wife of his youth” (Proverbs 5:18)—or “the husband of her youth,” as the case may be. He should think on his children, the shame it would bring them when they learn of his adulterous conduct, and the hurt it would cause them should the family be torn apart.

It is also pure and right for unmarried young people to think upon marriage and family. Many young people are swayed to sexual immorality in a moment of weakness. But think of what you would rob from your future spouse. Think of your future children. “*Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed unde-*

filed: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge” (Hebrews 13:4).

Think on Faithful Saints

In the verse following his exhortation to “*think on these things,*” Paul leads the reader to consider “*those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me*” (Philippians 4:9, emphasis LM). Paul had been an example to the Philippians as he had to many others (1 Corinthians 11:1; 1 Thessalonians 1:6; 4:1; 2 Timothy 3:10-11). We can likewise look to Paul and other faithful saints of Scripture for examples that motivate us to persevere (James 5:10-11). And we can think on faithful saints we have known personally who have served as examples for us.

If observing the examples of faithful saints in the past has encouraged us, will not the memories of such examples continue to provide encouragement? “*Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation*” (Hebrews 13:7). They may be current or former elders or deacons, preachers, Bible class teachers, or others who served as examples by their faithful conduct. As they follow(ed) Christ, we can continue to follow them to their and our heavenly reward.

And in times of temptation, think about the disappointment and sadness your falling from grace would bring them. When those Paul had taught departed from the faith, he grieved over their departures far more deeply than he would have grieved over their deaths (cf. Galatians 1:6; 3:1; 4:11-20). Thus he expressed his desire for the Philippian brethren, “*Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel*” (Philippians 1:27). Faithful saints

have the same desire for each of us. Having made it our first goal to please God, let us neither disappoint Him nor the faithful saints who hope to see our soul's final salvation.

Think on Doing Good

Although Paul speaks in Philippians 4:8 of **thinking** on good things, reflection is never to be the end of the process. Paul goes on to say in the following verse, *“Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you”* (Philippians 4:9, emphasis LM). As we have thought upon good things, we then seek to put good things into practice.

We can think about what good things we can do and how to accomplish them. Galatians 6:10 reads, *“As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.”* This does not mean that we should wait until opportunities fall into our laps. Opportunity comes first to those who seek it. We should think about ways we can teach the lost, bring up spiritual matters in conversation, help widows and others in need, raise our church contributions, do more in the work of the church, improve our families' spiritual focus, and similar things. Keeping one's heart not only prevents one from doing wrong, it also helps him do good. If good things are on your mind, let your mind bring forth the issues of life (Proverbs 4:23).

¹ *Logizomai*, in Bauer, Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 597-8.

² *Alēthēs*, BDAG, p. 43.

³ *Prophilēs*, BDAG, pp. 886-7; Ralph P. Martin and Gerald F. Hawthorne, “Philippians,” in *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 43 (n.p.: Nelson Reference and Electronic, 2004), p. 251.

⁴ J.B. Lightfoot, *Paul's Epistle to the Philippians* (n.p.: Hendrickson, 1999 printing), pp. 161-2.

⁵ This conditional clause uses a form expressing the assumption of reality. F. Blass and A. DeBrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament*, trans. and rev. Robert W. Funk (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), p. 189 (§372).

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GOD'S AUTHORIZED WORSHIP

- COLOSSIANS 3:17

1. **LORD'S SUPPER** - The New Testament and early church history record that Christians met on the first day of every week (Sunday) to worship God and remember Christ (Acts 20:7; I Corinthians 11:23-34; 16: 1-2).
2. **PRAYERS** - (Acts 2:42; Philippians 4:6-7; I Thessalonians 5:17-18).
3. **SINGING** - God's word authorizes only vocal music and specifically singing (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16; Hebrews 2:12). The New Testament shows no use of mechanical instruments of music in worship to God by the church Christ established. Church history notes no such use for nearly 700 years after the New Testament was completed. It is an innovation of men, not of God.
4. **GIVING** - Free-willed, cheerful, generous, and every week (Acts 20:35; I Corinthians 16:1-2; 2 Corinthians 8 & 9).
5. **PREACHING OF THE WORD** - The gospel of Christ, not men's doctrines nor entertainment, saves and strengthens us (Acts 2:42; 20:7; Romans 10:17; I Corinthians 1:18-23).

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