

# BATTLE FOR THE MIND

## VALUING AND STEWARDING THE REDEEMED MIND

Our defeat or victory begins with what we think, and if we guard our thoughts we shall not have much trouble anywhere else along the line.

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People are redeemed to love and glorify God, with all that they are and nothing less (Mark 12:30). But shamefully, we fail; not owing to any lack in God or His gospel, but rather to our own lack of faithfulness, loyalty, and devotion. We are a new creation thinking in the midst of an old and corrupted one. We are reconciled to the King while stationed in enemy territory. Herein lies the battle for the redeemed mind.

Do you have a new heart? If so, what can you do that an unregenerate person cannot?

Key to the battle for the mind is a right evaluation of the mind—apprehending the importance of the mind for loving God, especially realized in the practice of living for God's glory according to His wisdom.

We have considered the depth of depravity, the height of regeneration, and now we will consider the dangers that attend the regenerate mind. The battle for the mind is a battle to grow in our love to God in the midst of opposition. The world and the flesh will not allow your love of God to grow without serious opposition. The soldier who is ill prepared and ignorant of the enemy's tactics will suffer personal loss in his striving for the King's glory.

A new creature is as careful against wickedness in the head or heart, as in the life. He would be purer in the sight of God than in the view of men. He knows none but God can see the workings of his heart or the thoughts of his head, yet he is as careful that they should not rise up as that they should not break out.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Stephen Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock* (London: James Nisbet and Co., 1864–1866), 3:102.

## A DEADLY ASSUMPTION

We tend to be grossly passive in the cultivation of our minds for the purpose of loving God. We often fail to apprehend the gravity of our responsibility, especially those of us who prize the glory of God in His specific sovereignty over all things. The two, God's specific sovereignty and our personal responsibility, stand in perfect harmony for God's glory and our good. But troublesome to our naïve assumptions, godliness does not fall into our laps at the point of regeneration. An indifferent, lazy, untrained, undisciplined, unstable, or disinterested mind will not draw from Christ for Christ-likeness. Simply stated, a regenerate mind is not the same as a godly mind, to assume otherwise is dangerous.

Therefore, to assume little or no responsibility over your mind is dangerous—even deadly. Charles Bridges reminds us, “How little most people think they are responsible for their thoughts. They live as if they were on their own and so can indulge themselves without any restraints. But thoughts are the seminal principles of sin.”

Moses instructed, “Only take care, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life” (Deuteronomy 4:9). Elsewhere Scripture exhorts us, “Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life” (Proverbs 4:23). Jesus said, “But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap” (Luke 21:34).

Even in the days before smart phones, computers, and televisions, John Owen reflected on the weakness of many a Christian mind:

Profession of the life of God passeth with many at a very low and easy rate. Their thoughts are for the most part vain and earthly, their communication unsavoury, and sometimes corrupt, their lives at best uneven and uncertain as unto the rule of obedience; yet all is well, all is life and peace! The holy men of old, who obtained this testimony, that they pleased God, did not so walk before him. They meditated continually on the law; thought of God in the night seasons; spake of his ways, his works, his praise; their whole delight was in him, and in all things they 'followed hard after him.'<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, Richard Baxter warns,

What a life will that man live, that hath no known course of labour, but only such as accidentally he is called to? His work must needs be uncertain, various, unprofitable, and uncomfortable, and next to none. And he that hath not a stated course of employment for his thoughts, will have them do him little service. Consider first how much of the day is usually to be spent in common business: and then consider, whether it be such as taketh up your thoughts as well as your hands, or such as leaveth your thoughts at liberty: as a lawyer, a physician, a merchant, and most tradesmen, must employ their thoughts to the well-doing of their work.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> John Owen, “Grace and Duty of Being Spiritually Minded,” *The Works of John Owen* (Edinburg: T&T Clark), 7:301.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Baxter, “Christian Ethics,” *The Practical Works of the Rev. Richard Baxter* (London: James Duncan, 1830), 3:202.

In other words, if laboring for some earthly cause requires disciplined thinking then how much more our labors to love God?

## Above All Else

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*My son ... Keep your heart with all vigilance,  
for from it flow the springs of life.  
Proverbs 4:20, 23*

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*Godly wisdom is to guard the heart above all else.* If the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 1:7) then the guarding of the redeemed heart is the walk of wisdom (Proverbs 23:19).

“Above all else” is the key emphasis of the dictum. The phrase “with all vigilance” (ESV) comes from a comparative that in the original language (Heb. *mikkol*) means ‘above every’ or ‘more than anything else’ or ‘more vigilantly than in any other case’.<sup>4</sup> This is captured in a number of translations:

- **Above all that thou guardest keep thy heart;** for out of it are the issues of life. (Jewish Publication Society, *Holy Scriptures*, 1917)
- **More than all that you guard, guard your mind,** For it is the source of life. (Jewish Publication Society, *TANAKH*, 1985)
- **Above everything else, guard your heart;** for it is the source of life’s consequences. (*Complete Jewish Bible*, 1998)
- **Guard your heart above all else,** for it is the source of life. (HCSB)
- **Above all else, guard your heart,** for everything you do flows from it. (NIV)
- **Above every charge keep thy heart,** For out of it are the outgoings of life. (YLT)

Keil and Delitzsch render the original emphasis as, “before all that one has to guard, guard it [the mind] as the most precious of possessions committed to thy trust.” The keeping, guarding, or otherwise discipline of the mind is of first importance for the life that is serious about loving God. A disciplined mind is vital to growing closer and yielding yourself useful to the Lord; it is fundamental to godliness.

In his work on “How a Christian Should Exercise Himself to Godliness,” George Swinnock urges that a disciplined mind is of first importance:

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<sup>4</sup> See McKane, 310 and Waltke, 297.

If thou wouldst exercise thyself to godliness when thou art alone, guard thy heart against vain thoughts; this is the first work to be done, without which all that I have to commend to thee will be in vain. It is to no purpose to expect that a glass should be filled with costly wine, when it is filled already with puddle water. When the house beforehand was taken up by strangers, there was not room for Christ himself in the inn. If such flies be suffered and allowed in our hearts, they will spoil our best pots of ointment.<sup>5</sup>

Wisdom's great emphasis is placed on guarding or keeping the mind above all else. Because of the central influence the mind has on the whole of one's life, by necessity it is of highest importance. Wisdom dictates that if the heart is the locus of life, then it must be supervised above all other supervisions.

Be advised carefully to watch over the heart. Keep the fountain clean, and the streams will run pure. ... The eye, ear, tongue, and all the members are led and acted by the heart. Get then a humble, honest, and clean heart; watch over it, it is very slippery, a gulf of deceitfulness. Get the law of God written on your heart in golden characters of the Spirit; this being done, your heart will give laws to the senses, it will hold the reins of the eyes.<sup>6</sup>

## 1. DEFEND THE REDEEMED MIND

Since Satan cannot win the elect, he and every power of evil will labor to minimize our worship of God. Evil may not be permitted to touch your eternal life in Christ, but your mind remains in danger of assault. As the chief instrument of worship to God, your mind is the prime target of every wicked scheme through every possible means.

Everyone knows the importance of keeping a prize possession safely secure. All things touching the well-being of it are strictly guarded. Yet the mind most often goes unguarded, unprotected, and with no knowledge of how to recover it when it wanders.

We are at war and it is not simply those things visible that we must vanquish. How foolish would it be to spend all of one's reinforcements to contend with those enemies without, to spend all energies battling exterior temptations and sins, and in the meantime neglect the dangers of a traitorous mind on the inside? If we do not identify and address with highest priority the undisciplined mind, all our efforts to remedy our sinful conduct and lack of interest in holiness will only fatigue us to complacency.

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<sup>5</sup> George Swinnock, *The Works of George Swinnock* (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1868), 2:412-13.

<sup>6</sup> Robert Dingley, *Divine Opticks* (London: H. Cripps, 1655), 47-48.

## 2. DIRECT THE REDEEMED MIND

- **Proverbs 16:32** - Whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.
- **Proverbs 17:24** - The discerning sets his face toward wisdom, but the eyes of a fool are on the ends of the earth.
- **Proverbs 23:19** - Hear, my son, and be wise, and direct your heart in the way.
- **Colossians 3:2** - Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.

He that is unskilful or unable to manage his own thoughts with some activity, seriousness and order, will be a stranger to much of the holy converse which believer's have with God. They that have given up the government of their thoughts, and turned them loose to go which way fantasy pleaseth, and present sensitive objects do invite them, and to run up and down the world as masterless, unruly vagrants, can hardly expect to keep them in any constant attendance upon God, or readiness for any sacred work. And the sudden thoughts which they have of God, will be rude and stupid, savouring more of profane contempt, than of holiness, when they should be reverent, serious, affectionate and practical, and such as conduce to a holy composure of their hearts and lives.<sup>7</sup>

The instability of the mind, its readiness to receive impressions from things vain and useless, the irregularity of their thoughts, are a continual burden unto many.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Baxter, "The Divine Life," 13:167-68.

<sup>8</sup> Owen, 7:486.

### 3. DEVELOP THE REDEEMED MIND

[The] viewing habits of Christians are no different than those of non-Christians! Since TV is a business, it gives its customers — the public — what they want. It is but a mirror image of us. ... [Also:] Only 7 percent [of TV executives] attend church regularly, as compared to 55 percent of the viewing public; 44 percent have no religious affiliation, as compared to only 10 percent of the viewers having no such affiliation. ... It is impossible for any Christian who spends the bulk of his evenings, month after month, week upon week, day in and day out watching the major TV networks or contemporary videos to have a Christian mind.<sup>9</sup>

- **Proverbs 15:14** - The heart of him who has understanding seeks knowledge, but the mouths of fools feed on folly.

We must believe that our mental diet will—not *may*, but *will*—affect our love to God and enjoyment of His will.

### MAKE THE BEST USE OF YOUR TIME

Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, **making the best use of the time**, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. — Ephesians 5:15–17

Another time-waster is vain ungoverned and sinful thoughts. When men are wearied with vain works and sports, they continue unwearied in vain thoughts; when they want company for vain discourse and games, they can waste the time in idle, or lustful, or ambitious, or covetous thoughts alone without any company. In the very night time while they wake and as they travel by the way, yea while they seem to be serving God, they will be wasting the time in useless thoughts: so that this devoureth a greater proportion of precious time, than any of the former: when time must be reckoned for, what abundance will be found upon men's accounts, as spent in idle, sinful thoughts! O watch this thief; and remember, though you may think that a vain thought is but a little sin, yet time is not a little or contemptible commodity, nor to be cast away on so little a thing as idle thoughts: and to vilify thus so choice a treasure is not a little sin: and that it is not a little work that you have to do in the time which you thus waste. And a daily course of idle thoughts doth waste so great a measure of time, that this aggravation maketh it more heinous, than many sins of greater infamy.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Disciplines of a Godly Man* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001), 74-75.

<sup>10</sup> Baxter, "Christian Ethics," 3:166-67.