

Speaking to yourself vs. listening to yourself vs. talking with God

A Teaching Letter of Reflections Ministries

The Temporal and the Eternal (part 27) www.kenboa.org

The Gestation of Sin

When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. Don't be deceived, my dear brothers. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. James 1:13-17

In his book, *Not the way it's Supposed to Be*, Cornelius Plantinga discusses the nature of sin itself. Plantinga defines sin as a "culpable disturbance of shalom." What a perceptive insight. Sin disturbs the harmony of who we truly are. "Shalom" is about more than just peace. It's about unity and our rhythm with God. When people are in shalom with one another and with God, there is a convergence of authenticity. Anything that disrupts that is "sin." This fits well with what James says. The Shalom comes from above. In fact, we cannot create this kind of peace; instead, we are called to preserve it ("preserve the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace"). The evil from below is the thing that disturbs it.

Even Christians experience the temptation to live by a bottom-up system. We live in the world, and none of us are perfectly immune to its influences. The danger signs we just looked at all first appear in the mind and make their way to the heart. They'll not likely be noticeable in you until they've been there long enough to start producing their results in your life with others.

Notice the process here. This is the gestation of sin. First of all, it is conceived in your mind; then it grows, and then it finally gives birth. And when it gives birth, it gives birth to action. So the sin is the concretized mind, the outcome of the thoughts that we allowed, though we knew they were opposed to God. In other words, lust, evil desire, whatever is in your mind will eventually (if given freedom to grow) birth sin. What has lived for a time in the mind becomes real in the actions. And when sin is accomplished, when it's lived out its course, it brings forth death. In effect, this is the birth of death, and it all starts in the mind.

This is a problem, as a growing number of Christian Americans are allowing their thoughts to be guided more by culture than by their own faith systems. In a 2003 study, researcher George Barna found that almost half of the American population held a non-biblical moral view on at least half of the core behaviors he surveyed; this while roughly 80 percent of Americans claim to be Christians. How is this possible, that Bible-believing Christians hold non-biblical perspectives on key moral issues?

Inside Out

Your mind holds the key, and Romans 12:2 reminds us that we are transformed by its renewing. Ironically, though, almost every sermon I hear says, "This is what you ought to do" We hear that we ought to live out the faith of Old Testament heroes or we should do the things that Jesus told us to; our churches ought to be organized a certain way, and we ought to adhere to certain practices personally and corporately. But we don't hear very much about how we ought to think, how we manage our own will, about what we allow our minds to focus on, *the life that is lived inside our heads.*

1.

The thought life is critical. As a man thinks, so he is (Proverbs 23:7). If we begin with behavior, we won't necessarily change our thoughts, but rather will just hang new habits on an old nature. If we can get our thought life right, though, good actions are likely to emerge from the divine foundation those good thoughts provide, and the new nature can emerge. The system we're most familiar with works from the outside in, but the other system (the one Jesus advocated in his teaching ministry) works from the inside out. It demands that we start change by considering first what we believe and think and dwell on. This is critical especially since we rarely hear sermons about how to manage what is floating around in our brains. Without learning and practicing this discipline, we tolerate a great many thoughts that are not worthy of the person we've been called to be.

Living in this backward system as we do (and as we are rarely admonished not to do), we act and then rationalize our actions. We hear sermons filled with what Dallas Willard calls "the Gospels of Sin Management" and we practice it. We maintain our "personal sin profiles" in such a way as not to cause embarrassment to ourselves or others. We keep our sin "low-profile" as best we can and only share "safe" confessions and prayer requests with others. Who's to know what you're *really* thinking, anyhow? Right?

But your thought life will eventually be birthed into action. One way or another, it's inevitable, because the things you think about and allow your mind to dwell on are your "meditations," so to speak. Whether your sin is worry or lust or hatred or envy; what you spend large chunks of time thinking on will eventually change and shape your character. (Psychologists refer to this as the Law of Exposure. What you are most often exposed to is what you will remember.)

Our character will eventually expose some of what we've been thinking. It will demonstrate for a watching world whether we are thinking predominantly about sin, or if we are, rather, making every effort to keep God's Word in the forefront of our minds.

Talking to Yourself

The first step is to recognize the fact that your moods change. The next is to make sure that if you have once accepted Christianity, then some of its main doctrines shall be deliberately held before your mind for some time every day. C.S. Lewis

In his book, *Mere Christianity*, C. S. Lewis argues that once we've decided to believe in something (based on the evidence *for* it) we must be reminded of that evidence regularly. No belief Lewis says, will "automatically remain alive in the mind" without being fed. This is true, and this is why disciplines like Scripture reading, prayer, and meditation are so important.

But thought life is underplayed in our current American Christian culture. We have so understressed the practice of some spiritual disciplines that our wills have grown flabby and weak. We fail to train our minds toward holiness. Instead we just allow them to roam where they will without really making any choice about it. But there is good news. There is a choice to make. You can choose to **listen** to yourself (follow the thoughts where they may lead you), or you can choose to **speak** to yourself (decide where your thoughts are going to go). Listen to yourself, and you hear

the whining and complaining of your flesh, still full of the old nature's hatred and bitterness. Your flesh will naturally lead you off into all the wrong things. That's *listening* to yourself. You will meditate on something, whether it is something you've chosen or something you've just stumbled on. Your mind will always be ruminating on something.

The good news is in the other option: Speaking to yourself and choosing what you will think about. While right actions don't always lead to right thoughts, practice can create habits, especially when we practice on our attitude. Attitudes are manifested in actions; but actions, over the course of time, can work toward changing attitudes as well. It can be possible to think yourself into a new a new way of doing, and it's possible to do your way into a new way of thinking. Speaking to yourself gives you an opportunity to make a conscious choice.

End of Article

Additional comments by Tom Umberger

Even speaking to yourself as opposed to listening to yourself can still lead you into a trap if you are not careful. You should learn to listen to and speak with God, speaking God's truth to yourself. Remember Jesus says *"apart from me you can do nothing"* John 15:5b. It is vital that you learn to hear God's voice so you can discern who you are listening to. When you are hearing from God there is communion with Him and revelation of sin, past wounds, and hurts. If He reveals something in your thought life and a related emotional reaction that is not of Him, which is unholy, remember what you should do. Speak to God in the "middle voice". It's about the two of you working through the issues.

1. **Acknowledge the unholy reaction**, recognize it, confess it, repent of it (turn to God for His counsel and strength), and seek forgiveness (forgive others of their sin, seek their forgiveness when you have sinned against them, and forgive yourself as well). [*Bronze Lavers]
2. **Give the sin and emotions to God**. We wants to remove it as far as East is from the West. He will remember it no more i.e. He will not hold it against you. He wants you to not hold it against yourself as well i.e. don't let your flesh or anything else shame you by bringing it up. If that occurs cast it down and command it to leave in Jesus's name. Jesus died for you for these things. Trust Him. [*Holocaust Alter]
3. **Wash yourself in the Word of God**. [*Molten Sea] *"Be transformed by the renewing of your mind."* Rom. 12:1-2, and *"The Word of God is sharper than a double edged sword."* Hebrews 4:12

* Remember these are the priestly rituals practiced in Solomon's temple and repeated in the New Testament under the new covenant in Christ. *"And it is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three that bear witness, the Spirit and the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement."* 1John 5:7-8

1. Spirit [represented by the Bronze Lavers with their mirror like finish, which brings conviction of sin, "the man in the mirror"]
2. Blood [represented by the Holocaust Alter or the blood of Christ]
3. Water [represented by the Molten Sea or the Word of God]

* For more on this please visit



Teaching Topic 4 "Mind Renewal (Solomon's Temple)"