
Mental Attitude

Introduction

As a believer progresses in his Christian life, he experiences many profound changes in his thinking. His standards change gradually but radically; his frame of reference changes; his mental attitude soon becomes very different from what it once was. His previous way of thinking is replaced by the "mind of Christ" - God's viewpoint is becoming his own.

The greatest occupational hazard faced by a Christian is the failure to grow in Christ. Persistent personal sin carried on without repentance and confession keeps the Christian out of fellowship with the Lord and hinders the work of the Holy Spirit in the life.

The normal Christian life is a supernatural life. This life cannot be lived apart from the daily intake of spiritual food, the sustenance which comes with the study of the Bible accompanied by the continuous control and ministry of the Holy Spirit. Inattention to the teaching of the Word of God concerning the mechanics of daily Christian living results in failure to grow in Christ. The believer who will not overcome these problems will not be able to enjoy the benefits and blessings of the Christian life, and he will certainly not be productive as a child of God.

This article reviews several factors relating to the subject of the believer's mental attitude. First, we note several categories of mental attitude sin which are the result of "not thinking Grace". Then we see the methods by which God arranges for human viewpoint thinking to be replaced with divine viewpoint thinking. This study will also show some of the important results in the life of the Christian who develops a godly mental attitude.

The Sin of Not Thinking Grace

A Christian decides many times every day whether he will follow God's plan for his life. In decisions great or small he expresses either his dependence on the Lord or his desire to be independent of God's direction. A believer has access to the perfect plan of God for his life, a plan which has certain predetermined divine standards by

which every situation can be measured, by which every decisive opportunity can be judged. Many promises and blessings are available for use by the person who orders his life according to the patterns laid out in the Bible.

The person who is not positive to the plan of God, and who would apply his own human standards to life situations, does not operate by divine standards. He becomes involved in a variety of mental attitude sin problems stemming from his original decision to be independent of God. His life takes on the characteristics of one who does not "think Grace".

Grace is that characteristic of God which is an extension of His love for the human race and which causes Him to provide for every human need for time and eternity. The sacrificial death of Jesus Christ on the Cross was the Work which made it possible for God to view every person as free from the guilt of sin and as an object of God's Grace provisions.

Failure to order one's thinking according to Grace involves several aspects of mental attitude sin, including the following :

A SPIRIT OF PRIDE -- this is an exalted feeling based on personal success or position, or based on good training or education, on personal appearance, or on some natural gift or ability. Sinful pride is an inner feeling of self-importance which does not take into account God's provision of every resource and quality which goes into one's human traits and capabilities.

LOVE OF, OR DESIRE FOR, HUMAN APPROBATION AND PRAISE -- this is a secret fondness for being noticed and recognized. It is a love of supremacy, or it is the drawing of attention to oneself by various types of exhibitionism or by spiritual one-upmanship.

SELF WILL -- this is the concept of the stubborn or unteachable nature, or implacability. Self will is a disposition to be argumentative, harsh, bitter, which causes one to be a "nit picker" or critical in the extreme, or to mind the business of others, or to fail to recognize the rights and privacy of others.

SINFUL REACTION TO SOCIAL PRESSURES -- these are the sins of anger, impatience, touchiness, or of having a sensitive nature. There is often resentment and retaliation when disapproved or contradicted. This area of sin generates jealousy, sour grapes, envy, and the accompanying bitterness, hatred, carrying of grudges, revenge tactics, and so forth.

Magnifying the faults and failings of others while emphasizing one's own virtues.

NEGATIVE DISPOSITION -- this is peevishness, a fretful disposition, one that loves to be coaxed and honored. It is a dishonest, deceitful attitude. It is a disposition that tends toward discouragement and despondency under pressure along with the attempt to solve one's problems by hysteria and tantrums.

APATHY -- this sin is that of indifference to doctrine and to the Word of God in general. It is indifference to the lost condition of unbelievers or to the carnal condition of other believers.

Characteristics of a Believer's Mental Attitude

The true character of a believer in Jesus Christ is determined by his mental attitude. Prov. 23:7, "As a man thinks in his heart, so is he". See also 1 Pet. 1:13; 4:1; Heb. 12:3; Col. 3:1,2; 1 Cor. 2:16; 2 Cor. 10:4,5.

A Christian's mental attitude is not always apparent in his actions, but God always knows perfectly what a person is thinking. Heb. 4:12,13; Prov. 21:2. The following are examples of mental attitude thinking.

Worldliness is a mental attitude. Worldliness is not the doing of something wrong; it is the thinking which takes place independently of God's viewpoint. The remedy to the problem of worldliness is not in turning over a new leaf. It is a change in thinking (repentance) rather than a change in activity. Divine viewpoint must replace human viewpoint before a change in character can be expected. One can have an outward life which appears good, yet be filled with mental attitude sins. Col. 3:2; James 4:4.

Toughness, strength, and determination are mental attitudes. One is not beaten until he gives up mentally.

True Christian inner peace is a mental attitude. It is the relaxed mental state which enables one to enjoy the Christian life regardless of people or outward circumstances. With a good mental attitude, the believer can be joyful, relaxed, and can even enjoy the battle.

Mental stability is the result of thinking from a proper frame of reference, that is, Biblical thinking. The Christian who has mental fear, who is a chronic worrier, who cannot think clearly under pressure, who blames others for his problems, who cannot make correct decisions -- that believer is unstable. His emotions interfere with his thinking. Since emotion always follows thinking, emotional instability will always follow from incorrect (HVP) thinking. But God's Plan of Grace leads to rock-solid mental and emotional stability.

Man's Ideas vs Divine Viewpoint

Thinking requires words - vocabulary. Divine thinking requires divine vocabulary. "Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." Under any kind of spiritual pressure, human vocabulary, or human thinking, is not adequate. Only God's words can give the ability to think correctly under pressure. The Christian's ability to think correctly is based on how much Bible teaching is resident (applied) in the soul of the believer.

The Christian is commanded to have a new mental attitude. Col. 3:1,2; 2 Cor. 10:4,5; 1 Cor. 2:16; Phil. 2:5.

The warfare between two viewpoints in the believer's soul must be fought from within, first by knowledge of doctrine, and then by the application of truth to the life. 2 Tim. 2:15; 1 John 1:9.

Every believer has a mind which is capable of looking at life from God's point of view. Rom. 1:18 ff. Mental attitude divine viewpoint is obtained only through Bible study accompanied by the controlling ministry of the Holy Spirit. The Christian who habitually studies the Word learns to concentrate and to think from God's point of view, and thus he becomes stabilized. The "mind of Christ" (the source of God's viewpoint) is made clear in the Bible.

The Christian can be "transformed by the renewing of the mind" through study, knowledge, and application of Bible truth. By this means his deci-

sions and actions are most likely to be in agreement with Bible principle. And this is the only sure sign of Christian maturity and victorious Christian living.

The Human Conscience

The conscience is located in the mind and is the center for the operating standards of the human soul. Titus 1:15. The conscience convicts the Christian of evil or wrongdoing. John 8:9. The conscience establishes standards for both human and divine relationships. Acts 24:16.

The conscience functions on thinking; and the believer in fellowship has a conscience which functions from resident (applied) divine viewpoint. Rom. 2:15; 9:1, as related to applied Bible teaching. The conscience establishes standards for serving God. 2 Tim. 1:3; Heb. 9:14. But false operating standards in the conscience produce legalism. 1 Cor. 8:7.

The more the believer uses applied Bible doctrine, the stronger his conscience becomes in using such things as the Law of Liberty and the superseding laws of love and sacrifice. 1 Cor. 10:24-29. Conscience is the basis for enduring mistreatment and misunderstanding without defending oneself. 1 Pet. 2:19; 3:16. The conscience can be damaged or destroyed with false doctrine and with a callused soul. 1 Tim. 4:1,2.

The Mechanics of Replacing Human Viewpoint with Divine Viewpoint

The Christian life is a supernatural life and cannot be lived without the filling of the Holy Spirit and the daily function of applied Bible teaching. Rom. 8:2; 7:6; Gal. 5:25; Eph. 5:18. All changes must come from within, and the Holy Spirit must originate divine good by applying doctrine to the life.

We begin a change of viewpoint at the moment of salvation. At that time we changed our mental attitude toward the Lord Jesus Christ. Acts 3:19. That was repentance and faith, and it resulted in our regeneration. John 3:16. At that moment many benefits were made available to us, blessings and promises from God which enable us to live in a manner which is both acceptable to the Lord and which also produces great happiness for us. We are given the ability to think those things which will bring honor to the Lord. Eph. 5:18; 4:23; Col. 3:2.

The choice of whether to make use of the divine operating assets is made by the believer every day. The power of our walk with the Lord depends on Bible teaching, the work of the Holy Spirit, and the believer's positive volition. Daily Bible teaching under the controlling ministry of the Holy Spirit builds up divine standards in the human soul and conscience. 1 Tim. 1:5,19; 3:9.

The Benefits of Having a Proper Mental Attitude

With the proper mental attitude, the Christian will have victory, peace, power, and mental stability. Phil. 2:5; 2 Tim. 1:7. The Christian can experience perfect inner peace, ever during times of difficulty and suffering. Phil. 4:7. Inner peace comes from what we think. Isa. 26:3. Divine viewpoint brings mental stability and eliminates discouragement, anxiety, instability, fearfulness, and double-mindedness. Stability of mind and character is a mental attitude of strength.

The believer with divine viewpoint has a gracious attitude toward others. He is a mature believer characterized by mental attitude love who is a channel of the Grace of God. Deut. 6:5; 11:13. A mental attitude from DVP produces confidences based on absolute values and standards. 2 Cor. 5:1,6,8.

Mental Attitude and the Believer's Ministry

The mature believer "thinks Grace", which is the "mind of Christ". Therefore, the Christian's life and personality are characterized by many of the qualities of the life of the Lord Jesus Christ. Rom. 8:29; Gal. 5:22 ff. In every one of these characteristics the Christian has one basic ingredient - correct thinking according to divine viewpoint. 1 Pet. 3:8

Therefore, the mature believer is gentle, compassionate, caring, and has a gracious attitude toward others. These are essential life qualities in any believer who is a good witness for Christ. With these qualities, and with the knowledge of the Word of God being acquired on the way to maturity, the believer cannot help but be an outstanding witness for Christ and a skillful practitioner in the use of his spiritual gifts.