

Think About What God Has Said

Good morning, and happy father's day to all of the fathers here this morning. When the Apostle Paul was giving his instructions to Christian families in his letter to the Ephesians, he had this to say to fathers: ***"Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord"*** (Ephesians 6:4 [RSV]). Nothing is so important for fathers to do than to follow this command to raise their children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord, and to do so takes work. It means we will have to engage ourselves in knowing what God's will is, which means we must study, learn and apply God's will in our loves so that we can teach it to our children. In other words, it is going to take effort.

The role of men, particularly here in 21st century America, has been downplayed to a great extent. This is very unfortunate, for God's word makes it quite clear that men and fathers are to be the spiritual leaders of their homes. In fact, the relationship God expects between husbands and wives is compared to that of Christ and the church, which is His bride. Paul wrote in Ephesians 5:22-33 [RSV],

22. Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord. 23. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, His body, and is Himself its Savior. 24. As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands.

25. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her, 26. that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27. that He might present the church to Himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

28. Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29. For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the church, 30. because we are members of His body. 31. "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." 32. This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church; 33. however, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

God has always wanted His people to study and meditate upon His word. God told Joshua following the death of Moses in Joshua 1:8 [RSV], ***"This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall have good success."***

David wrote centuries later, ***“Make me understand the way of Your precepts, and I will meditate on Your wondrous works”*** (Psalm 119:27 [RSV]). When we do as David suggests and study God’s word, then we, too, will come to the same conclusion as David did when he wrote in Psalm 119:127 [RSV], ***“Therefore I love Your commandments above gold, above fine gold.”*** David could say that God’s commandments are more precious than fine gold because it is through His word, His commandments, that salvation is found.

Here are some questions to be asked of all of us, but particularly the men who are the spiritual heads of your respective homes: Whose hands are forming my heart and mind, and the hearts and minds of my children? What are they being formed into? What is my responsibility in the process?

Whether you realize it or not, your character, and that of your children, is being formed and solidified with each passing day. This is true whether you plan through what you want to be or if you just let life happen. Some of the most powerful influences on the development of your character, and that of your children, come from the following sources: What you read; what you look at; what you listen to, the people with whom you associate; and what you think about. All of these influence the shaping of your character.

All these things feed your brain, and the brains of your children, and together they become a significant influence in the way your mind is programmed. Piece by piece, like bricks in a wall, this programming trains you how to respond, how to think, what to think, what to value and pursue, how to treat others and what you should and should not do. Do not be deceived, even small amounts of negative input has a noticeable effect over the long run. You have heard the expression that applies to computers – “garbage in, garbage out.” This applies to your mind as well. You can be holy in an unholy world, but it is hard to avoid being affected by the ungodly influence that society has on you, if that is where you choose to associate yourself with for the most part. It is all around us every day. Society does not teach godly behavior. Each day we are exposed to a great deal of negative re-enforcement. But, we can limit this negative input by carefully selecting the things we do when and where there is a choice. For example:

Avoid watching television shows which suggest ungodly behavior is acceptable. Do not rent or go to see movies which expose your minds to crude and unacceptable behavior. The images on a TV screen are very strong and have a powerful teaching influence on the mind, especially young minds. Many things we see on television are entertaining, but not helpful for building ourselves up in the Lord.

Do not read books which glorify ungodliness. Artwork and anything else we have in our houses should be in good taste and not conflict with the teaching of Christ.

Refuse to listen in on dirty jokes or gossip. Do not participate in the activities of crude people. I hesitate to say do not be friends with crude people, because our primary goal is to be witnesses for Christ. Rather, do not participate in or enjoy their activities. Be salt and light to the lost of the world. Paul wrote in Ephesians 5:4 [RSV], ***“Let there be no filthiness, nor silly talk, nor levity, which are not fitting; but instead let there be thanksgiving.”***

Do not listen to music which promotes sin and ungodliness.

Much of the above should be repulsive to a Christian anyway because they are opposed to God. But now to the point of it all. Instead of filling your mind with even more rubbish than you get from the world everyday anyway, see to it that you fill your mind with good things instead. And do not nurture the bad which is already there, but rather, get rid of it as the garbage that it is. There is plenty for us to do. Do not feel obligated to watch much television. Spend time in activities with your family. Participate in fellowship with Christians and associate yourself with godly people. The point is, you need to avoid deliberately certain types of input and replace it with others. In doing so, you will begin to find that you are free to live a life pleasing to God.

David wrote in Psalm 19:14 [RSV], ***“Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.”***

Too often we seem to view studying God’s word and spending time in devotion and meditation to God and one another as burdensome. But instead of viewing these as times of encumbrance, we should see it as what it truly is: It is a time of blessing. It will be an especially good time of blessing if we, as fathers, do this with our children.

What, then, is Christian meditation? It is the deliberate practice of turning our hearts and our minds to the *full time task* of bringing the word of God to life in the daily activities of our lives. As I said earlier, God wants to change us from the inside out. He wants to renew our minds and hearts so they will become more like His own. However, it is **only** by God's grace and power that this could ever happen. We **cannot** change ourselves, but we must **want** to change. God uses a number of things to accomplish this. But the primary tool He uses is His own word recorded in the Bible. If we ignore it, He cannot work in us. If we use it and put it to use, He will be able to enter into our lives and form us into what He wants us to be. Meditation on the word of God allows its transforming power to renew our minds and change our hearts.

Meditation centers on the relationship we have with God that comes through Jesus Christ. It seeks to improve this relationship by allowing God to use His word to renew our minds and our hearts through knowledge of His will. The word

of God plays a central role in meditation because it is the place where our knowledge of God originates. We must, therefore, determine to know the word of God so that we have the material we need for meditation available to us. This involves diligent study and memorization of the Scriptures. This will make sure that everything in the Scriptures will be at your fingertips when you want it. Memorized Scripture plays an important role in the art of meditation.

1. Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; 2. but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night” (Psalm 1:2 [RSV]).

When we study and meditate upon God’s word, we learn how to apply His ways for our life. We learn how to live our lives in accordance to His will. **“I have laid up Your word in my heart, that I might not sin against You”** (Psalm 119:11).

Fixing our sight on God only comes through studying His word, for it is there we learn what is pleasing to Him. The more time we spend in meditation and study of God’s word, the more we learn to love the commandments of God. **“I will meditate on Your precepts, and fix my eyes on Your ways”** (Psalm 119:15), **“ . . . for I find my delight in Your commandments, which I love”** (Psalm 119:47).

Jesus calls to us to follow Him, and He makes it clear that it will not be grievous or burdensome when we do. In fact, it will bring great joy and relief to the believer. **28. “Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.”** (Matthew 11:28-30 [RSV])

When we take on the yoke of Jesus and keep His commandments, we find ourselves overcoming the world and all that it has to throw at us. **1. Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is a child of God, and everyone who loves the parent loves the child. 2. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey His commandments. 3. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome. 4. For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith.** (1 John 5:1-4 [RSV])

Paul wrote in Colossians 3:1-3 [RSV], **1. If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on Earth. 3. For you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God.**

Our love for God and all that He has done for us should spurn us to love Him and others. **7. Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God. 8. He who does not love does not know God; for God is love.** (1 John 4:7-8 [RSV])

Jesus Christ founded the Christian faith upon the principle of love – Christians wholeheartedly loving God and each other. John, one of Christ's disciples, apostles and closest friends, penned these words near the end of his life: **"And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him"** (1 John 4:16 [RSV]).

The Apostle John, as well, later writes on in this chapter: **"If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?"** (1 John 4:20). As we can see, God commands us to love and He condemns those who claim to love Him while they hate their brothers. Again in 1 John 3:14 it states, **" . . . he who does not love his brother abides in death."** Such statements need to be taken seriously to heart, especially in these days when we see communities dividing into factions.

The more we spend in communion with the Father, the more we long and desire to be with Him. **"Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day,"** wrote David in Psalm 119:97 [RSV]. We understand how our sins have separated us from Him. But once we come to Him, then we can be at peace with Him. **"Great peace have those who love Your law; nothing can make them stumble. I hope for Your salvation, O Lord, and I do Your commandments"** (Psalm 119:165-166 [RSV]). And we can only come to Him through His Son, Jesus Christ, Who said, **"I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by Me"** (John 14:6 [RSV]). It is only through following His way that we can achieve **"the peace of God, which passes all understanding"** Paul speaks of in Philippians 4:7. We achieve peace with God, for we are no longer an enemy of God. In fact, not only are we no longer enemies, we are His children: **15. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" 16. it is the Spirit Himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17. and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him.** (Romans 8:15-17 [RSV])

When we follow the Lord's commandments, we do so because we love Him. It is a mark of one who is in the Lord that one follows His commands. **"If you love Me, you will keep My commandments,"** said Jesus in John 14:15 [RSV]. Doing the Lord's will should become second nature to the child of God.

15. Practice these duties, devote yourself to them, so that all may see your progress. 16. Take heed to yourself and to your teaching; hold to that, for

by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers. (1 Timothy 4:15-16 [RSV])

Meditation on the things of God yields wisdom and purity. It yields spiritual maturity and communion with God.

Did you know that you are what you are right now – not what you would like to be, nor what you ought to be, nor are you what you used to be. You are what you are today. Today, the 'real you' is shown by what you do and by what you think about in your heart – what you meditate on. Furthermore, the things that you allow your heart to dwell on today are building what you will be for tomorrow and the tomorrow after that.

Let's look at some verses which illustrate that you act out of and can be judged by the state of your heart.

“The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks” (Luke 6:45 [RSV]).

20. And He said, “What comes out of a man is what defiles a man. 21. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, fornication, theft, murder, adultery, 22. coveting, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. 23. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a man.” (Mark 7:20-23 [RSV])

The verses quoted below from the Apostle Paul describe to us what we should be doing. But this type of meditation does not come naturally. By nature, we stir up and act out that which is in our hearts. If your heart is filled with good things, you will have a tendency to meditate on good things. If your heart is filled with bad things, you will naturally think about and meditate on these things.

“Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things” (Philippians 4:8 [RSV]).

1. I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. 2. Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. 3. For by the grace given to me I bid every one among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith which God has assigned him. (Romans 12:1-3 [RSV])