



A V o i c e F r o m T h e W i l d e r n e s s

The Inner Man

STOP! THINK! Where were your thoughts just five minutes ago? Just five minutes before you picked up this article and began to read. What were you thinking about two hours ago? Where were your thoughts? What feelings were you experiencing? How about yesterday and the day before? Take just a few minutes to reflect on these questions before you continue to read.

Were you honestly at rest? Were your thoughts and feelings such that you would not be embarrassed if someone who was standing beside you knew exactly what you were thinking and feeling? Were your thoughts, feelings and emotions ones that you would be experiencing if you were in heaven right now?

Why do I ask such questions? Because it is in this area of our lives, in "the inner man," where character is formed. "If the thoughts are wrong, the feelings will be wrong, and the thoughts and feelings combined make up the moral character." MCP 660. It is not how I dress or eat. It is not my organizational ability. It is not my intellect or reasoning. It is not my attendance at church or even my Christian profession that determine my character. It is determined by the thoughts and resulting feelings that I have. That's why we are told to **bring** "into captivity every

thought to the obedience of Christ." II Corinthians 10:5. If we don't our natural, human, fleshly tendency will be to think about ourselves our "self" first in all situations. Even our thoughts of others will be in relationship to how they affect us.

Genesis 6:5 says it this way, "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that **every imagination** (reasoning) of the **thoughts** of the heart (the inner man) was only **evil continually** (every day)." The thoughts of the people were self centered. Their reasonings were self motivated and actuated. Isn't that the way it is today?

I remember clearly one Sabbath when we were driving to church. On the way something my husband said struck a cord in my heart. I didn't agree and I told him so. Then, he responded to my disagreement, and I to his, and so it went back and forth, each time getting more intense, more calculated, more cutting. Each of our thoughts generated feelings and emotions that corresponded to them. **SELF** was very **ALIVE!** My thoughts - my husband's thoughts were centered on the self in each of us. In the back seat seeing and hearing were our two little girls. The ones we were raising to be Christians. The ones we

told that it was not like Jesus to argue. We were now pulling into the church parking lot and both of us got our last word in before we opened the car doors. Taking our little girls by the hand we walked into the church and the first person that met us we each greeted with a big smile and said, "Hi, it's so nice to see you. Isn't it a lovely Sabbath."

What part of this little story do you think had the greatest impact on our character? Do you think our girls learned more by how we acted in the car or at church? You see our profession and all the outward display and reforms are valueless if our thoughts are not **in** Christ. Neither of us had true peace - the peace that radiates from our countenance from within. The aura that we may not see but is visible to others.

And where did all this manifestation of self begin? In My thoughts - in my husbands thoughts. Each of us thinking, rehearsing and massaging our own thoughts inwardly with our feelings and emotions in active agreement with those thoughts. The two in combination became our character and were allowed to find expression in the words we spoke to one another.

But friends, it doesn't have to be this way. There is **HOPE!** There is **FREEDOM** for us from this bondage of selfish, wrong thoughts. It is found in the working of God's Spirit in our thoughts. "That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man." Ephesians 3:16. Did you hear that? God will work in our minds and strengthen our minds (give us His thoughts to think) through His Spirit that we may receive His glory - His character. But we must make the choice to surrender our own thoughts and take hold of the thoughts He will give us. Let me illustrate.

My husband wrote a special thank you note to some friends who had helped us with a work project. Usually I write the thank you notes. He wanted to do it just for me, to free me up to do some other things around the home. When he had finished the note card he handed it to me to read, sign and have each of the children sign it and get it ready for the mail. At the time he handed it to me I had several other things in my hand, and decided to finish what I was doing first. Well, some time went by and I forgot about the card. Latter that day, just before the mail

was to go out, Tom came to get the card. I said, "Oh, I forgot all about it, I'll get it ready right away." But I couldn't find the card. I looked at my desk, in the papers I had in my hand, in the stationary drawer where I had been earlier, everywhere I could think of that I had been, and even felt in my pockets, but no note was to be found.

What kind of natural thoughts do you think began to tempt me? "Why couldn't he have just waited to give me that card, he could see that I was busy already. He could have just as easily had the children sign it himself." But immediately when the flesh naturally began to want to rise, I recognized another thought and that was a call from God's Spirit. **Make no excuses, cast no blame**, take full responsibility. Right at that very moment I had a decision to make. I chose to listen to the Spirit instead of self and He gave me the words to respond to my husband. "Honey, I'm very sorry, I cannot find the card anywhere. I've looked all over for it and cannot find it. I'll be happy to write out another one before the mail." With these thoughts came the feelings of tenderness and compassion for my husband, realizing that he had taken 20 minutes of his time to help me and I had

wasted it. My thoughts and feelings expressed to him helped to make it easier for him to surrender his temptation to become upset and as the Spirit worked in both of us inwardly - the outward fruit born to all in our home was **humility, forgiveness and peace**. You see, all 3 of our children were watching and listening to see if we were going to be "real, living Christians."

This may seem so insignificant friends, but this is how He wants to strengthen us "by His Spirit in the inner man." It is too often the case that in these little things we let our natural, fleshly thoughts rule us and our feelings harmonize with them, making us and those around us very miserable. We rehearse our thoughts quietly in our own minds, we mull them over. Our feelings and emotions enter into action stimulated from our thoughts and soon such a small trial turns into a **BIG DEFEAT** in our Christian life. Why? Because we have not allowed the Spirit of God to work on the inner man, we have wanted to think and believe as we view it from our perspective, not others or God's. MCP 347-348 says it like this, "God leads His people on, step by step. He brings them into positions which are **calculated** to reveal the motives of

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the heart. Some endure at one point but fall off at the next. **At every advance step the heart is tested and tried a little closer.** If any find their hearts opposed to the straight work of God, it should convince them that they have a work to do in overcoming, or they will be finally rejected of the Lord." Why? Because our thoughts and feelings together make up our moral character. In the inner man we have said no to the Spirit and our character becomes like our adversary.

Another area that is difficult for me is to be misunderstood or misrepresented for my words, actions or motives. Sometimes we can have another person's best interest in our heart but they perceive it otherwise. As they rehearse only their perspective and hold their own opinion, it may lead to irritation and anger. In these experiences I have prayed that my heart would be right and that God would work in theirs also. What an encouragement to be kept by the power of God through faith, kept in my thoughts and emotions, the inner me. Not just saying my words right or guarding my expressions, but really kept in "the inner man." And what a blessing to see God's power work to also change the thoughts and attitude of the other person. Then as both are fully yielded to God's will, reconciliation can take place. But what if the other person won't let go of their thoughts and opinions no matter how kind, loving and honest you are? Sometimes the person may only become more irritable and angry. They are convinced that they are right and nothing you say or do will change their mind. Proverbs 23:7 says it this way, "As he thinketh in his heart, so is he." Whatever our thoughts are, that is what we will become.

Friends, are you holding onto wrong thoughts and feelings? Are you holding bitterness, hatred, anger toward someone or maybe just holding yourself aloof from a person who doesn't see it "my way"? Are you wives holding bitterness against your husband because of the way he has treated you? Are you husbands holding thoughts and feelings against your wife because she isn't meeting your needs as you perceive them? Are you children holding onto feelings of resentment against your parents? Are your thoughts pure? Or are you deceiving yourself to think that you can let your mind wander on in secret imagination or passion, thinking that no one will

ever know? Do you find yourself "feeling" depressed? How can we know if we're holding on to some of these things? The easiest way for me to know in my own heart is what **thoughts** do I have about that person and what **feelings** are associated with those thoughts? When I detect any wrong thought or feeling, I immediately ask the Lord to take it from me to give me freedom from my natural heart. I **chose to banish** the thought and the Lord gives me other thoughts to take their place and I think on these (Philippians 4:8). If we chose to hold onto our own thoughts they will consume us and we will **become what we think**. "It is a law both of the intellectual and the spiri-

tual nature that by beholding we become changed. The mind gradually adapts itself to the subjects upon which it is allowed to dwell. It becomes assimilated to that which it is accustomed to love and reverence." MCP 331. When my feelings and emotions are low, I make the choice to think right thoughts, and take a walk and become active doing the work God has given me to do right in my own home. I will no longer allow myself to lay in the "bed of despair," but arise and walk like the man at the pool of Bethesda, and **God changes me from the inside**. The inner man is strengthened

by His Spirit. It is here that **true peace and rest** is found **regardless of my circumstances**. This requires me to have faith in a power above and outside of my own strength. To place my full dependence upon Christ when my thoughts and feelings dictate self pity and self justification.

We may suppose that our thoughts, secret passions or desires are hid from others and that there is no harm in them, but they will at some point in our life be manifested if they are not overcome in the inner man. "The season of temptation, under which, it may be, one falls into grievous sin, does not create the evil that is revealed but only develops or makes manifest that which was **hidden** and **latent** in the heart." MB 60

I remember very clearly an experience I had with bitterness many years ago. When I was in High School I attended a boarding academy. Each year at this school there were two banquets. At the first banquet in the fall two students, one boy and one girl, were chosen by the faculty to be honored as the "COURTESY KING AND QUEEN" of the school. At the second banquet in the

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Spring, they would again choose two students to be honored as the "KING & QUEEN" of the school. The qualification for receiving this honor was more than courteousness. It also included good grades, exceptional attendance, school spirit and support, how well you got along with all other students and faculty, besides being courteous.

In my Senior year after the first banquet one of the faculty members told me that my name had come up to receive the "Courtesy Queen" honor, but it was decided that I should receive the honor of "QUEEN" of the school at the Spring banquet instead. Now, if I had never been told that, do you think I would have had any expectations? And what thoughts do you imagine I had the day of the banquet? I still remember getting ready thinking how exciting it would be to be chosen the **QUEEN!** I made sure my hair was just right. I had a new blue satin & lace dress made just for this occasion. Then the moment came. I scooted to the edge of my chair. The announcement was made, but I didn't hear my name. Bewildered, I asked another person at the table whose name was called. **IT WAS NOT ME!** Right at that very moment I was filled with thoughts and emotions of hurt, disappointment and amazement. I went to the faculty member who told me months before that I had been chosen and questioned her. She told me that she had decided since I had already received so many leadership roles that year at school, she had chosen someone else and that she was sure I would understand. But I didn't. I had been chosen. It wasn't fair! For lack of space, I cannot tell you all that transpired, but I can tell you that in my thoughts the hurt changed to anger, resentment and bitterness. I knew these were not right, but I just quietly pushed them down and tried to forget them. I didn't go around the school telling everyone how I had been wronged, no one knew except a few close friends, but I was not at rest in my heart with this individual. I still treated her nice on the outside, but certainly didn't go out of my way for her.

After graduation and in the years that followed, I never gave it any more thought. But one day more than 10 years after I graduated another faculty member came to visit our family. As we were visiting and reminiscing he mentioned the name of that faculty member who had hurt me. Immediately all the feelings of the past arose - **afresh and alive** - hurt, anger, and bitterness just as if the situation had just happened. Just like I felt more than 10 years before. I sat in silence. I was shocked that all

those old feelings and thoughts remained throughout the years. I thought I had dealt with them by not rehearsing them any more. In the quietness of my thoughts I prayed to the Lord and said, "Father, I no longer want these thoughts and feelings. I want to be free from this bondage." And it was then that I had **peace**. It was that simple. **Immediately all thoughts and feelings were gone** and I have never had them return. Oh yes, the thoughts of the experience have returned, but not the bondage of the old feelings and emotions. Now I can talk about that individual and have no feelings of bitterness or animosity toward her. I love her and there is nothing that separates me from her in my heart. "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life." Proverbs 4:23

Friends, it is not enough just to put a smile on our face, and try to say the right words to give the outward impression of being a Christian. The Lord wants to free us from our self focus and pride of opinion. He longs to restore us fully to His likeness. When the little test and trials come to us through the day, as they surely do, He wants us to turn our thoughts to Him. He wants us to ask, "**What saith my Lord?**" Joshua 5:14, and then allow Him to truly strengthen us in "the inner man."

A Voice From The Wilderness

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