

Sinful Thoughts: what they are and how to overcome them

7 Propositions

1. God *knows* the thoughts of the heart, Gen 6.5; Ps 14.1; Mt 9.4; Heb 4.12; Isa 59.7; Ps 139.2, 4
 - A. A man's "thoughts" are the "talkings of his mind" with or about the things he knows. It's those interviews and chats which the mind has with the things that are let into it through Eyegate and Eargate. The mind makes these things its companions and with its thoughts deliberates, consults, and reasons about them, *thereby holding* the objects in view for its affections, either as things to be loved or hated, *and thereby moving* the will to reject them or pursue them.
2. The Lord *abhors* evil thoughts and counts them sins, Mt 5.28; 15.19-20; Ezk 23.18-19; Pr 15.26.
 - A. When God accounted the guilt of the old world and the justice of the flood, what did He allege? Their murders, blasphemies, adulteries, idolatries, or thievery? No. All He charged them with was evil thoughts. These alone justified His great wrath, Gen 6.5-7
3. Evil thoughts must be *washed* by repentance and forgiveness or else they defile and damn like any other sin, Dt 15.9; Jer 4.14; Mt 5.28; 15.19-20
 - A. In other words, a man may *think* himself to hell if the sinfulness of his thoughts are not forgiven by God. There's enough ungodliness in our sinful thoughts to ruin us forever.
 - B. If God were to forgive all our word-sins and all our deed-sins, and leave only our thought-sins unforgiven, we'd be undone forever, Acts 8.20-23; Gen 6.5-7
4. Sinful thoughts *entertained* lead to sinful actions done, Mt 15.19 & Mk 7.21; Rom 12.17; Job 31.1
 - A. Sinful thoughts are root-sins and the root of all other sins. Thoughts are the firstborn of the soul; words and actions are only younger brothers. They are the oil that feeds and maintains the wick, which would otherwise go out. Life-sins receive their nourishment from thought-sins. All sins flow like rivers from the fountain and ocean of evil thoughts, Js 1.14-15
 - B. The heart is the rendezvous of all wickedness, the inn where all the traveling lusts that are in the world lodge before they go out and sin the day away, Ps 14.1-3; Pr 4.14-16; Isa 59.7; Mic 2.1
 - C. The thoughts go before and the feet follow after. Look and see that the first movement of the prodigal son was in his thoughts, Lk 15.17. His thinking led to his returning because it was the very beginning of it.
5. God cares what we think about, because His Law *governs* our thoughts, calling us to think holily, Phil 4.8; Col 3.2; Ps 1.1-3; Pr 21.29
 - A. Men judge our inside by our outside, our heart by our works; but God judges our outside by our inside, our works by our heart. In fact, this is one blessing of the covenant of grace: that God looks at His children's heart's desires before their body's actions and judges the latter in light of the former, the deed in light of the desire, Jn 21.15-17; Rom 7.22-8.2
6. God's people are to keep a reign on their thoughts, *not entertaining* sinful thoughts, 2Cor 10.5; Col 3.5
 - A. Though we cannot keep them out (for they will ever be able to enter as long as we are in this house of clay) yet we must not let them lodge within us anymore.
 - B. It's not what thoughts are in your hearts, or what passes through them, but it's what lodging you give them that makes the difference and proves your repentance. Many good thoughts and motions may pass as strangers through a bad man's heart. And, likewise, multitudes of vain thoughts may make a highway of a believer's heart, disturbing him in good duties, knocking on his heart to interrupt him. These may break in upon the heart of a good man, but they must not be allowed to stay there if we ever expect to live holily.
 - C. Evil thoughts may be thrust in by Satan or men (like men swearing or coarsely joking around us), but unless they're entertained by us, they remain *their* children and not *ours*, and therefore their sin and not ours. *This*, then, alerts us to where we incur guilt with regards to thoughts

thrust in: when the heart is soft towards them, and when there's an inward love for them so that the heart "kisses the child"—it's *then* that they become our thoughts and our sins. When the heart broods on those eggs, then they're *surely* our thoughts, even if they originated from outside our own minds.

D. It's the great design of the gospel to bring our thoughts to the obedience of Christ. Indeed, it's the glory of the gospel, beyond all the world's philosophies and religions, that it has such a great influence on the hearts and thoughts of men—and this because it begins by changing the heart of a man, Ezk 36.25-27; Isa 55.6-7; Ps 119.59; Lk 15.17

7. God's people need God's *grace* to think holily, Ps 19.14; 51.10; 139.23-24; Job 31.1; Jn 15.5

8. Goodwin on Jer 4.14

1. The heart is a house of rooms to entertain and lodge guests. Before conversion, all your sinful thoughts ran riot all the day long, having free, open access to your heart and the heart gave them willing, cheerful welcome and entertainment. And there, in your heart, they lodged, day and night, defiling its rooms with their loathsome filth and vomits.
2. "How long," says the Lord, "shall they lodge within, while I, with my Spirit and train of graces, stand outside and knock (Rev 3.20) and find no entry?"
3. Those unruly guests must be turned out of doors without any warning. They have stayed there long enough, too long; "how long!?" The time past is more than enough for their entertainment; they must lodge there no more.
4. Though they cannot be kept out entirely, yet you must not let them lodge there anymore. When you find them, you must give them no place, for they will bring seven worse with them.
5. Our thoughts are the first motioners of all the evil in us. They make the motion, and also bring the heart and object together. They are panderers to our lusts, holding up the object until the heart has played the adulterer with it and committed folly. And even in *speculative uncleanness* (the working of the imagination when an object is not in view) they hold up the images of the gods they create until the heart falls down and worships. They talk of its credit, riches, and beauty, until the heart has worshiped it, all while the things themselves are not in view. O wicked and sinful thoughts!
6. The vanity of the thoughts can be clearly seen in these particulars:
 1. In a lack of ability to ordinarily and naturally raise good and holy thoughts out of all ordinary occurrences and occasions. E.g. when a person injures us, are we not more prone to think the worst than the best of them? When providence crosses us, are we not more prone to think ill of God than good? When a person hurts us, are we not more prone to think of revenge than of covering it with love? When we see a person fall under God's rod, are we not more prone (like Job's friends) to think of how sinful they are to deserve such treatment than how beloved they may be to be so preferred by God with more sanctifying treatment? When our outward mercies abound, are we not more prone to think how much easier we can live than how much more good we can do for others? When God's judgements befall us, are we not sooner to complain and devise a way of escape than to bless the Lord and exercise patience under it?
 2. In a loathsomeness to entertain holy thoughts and to think of God and the gospel. We're as loath as our children to do their school work, because, like them, we'd rather play. How glad are we when an excuse arises from other occasions so we can knock off our thoughts from what is good and turn them again to folly? And when thinking of the things of earth, we think the time passes too fast; but when thinking of the things of God, we think it moves too slowly.
 3. In that though we entertain good thoughts, yet the mind is not, will not be, long intent upon them. How easily are we distracted! How quickly drawn away! How unsteady! We

can focus on vanity with ease and fixation, but with the things of God we're stumble like a drunkard, hardly able to keep our way. And when we do speak with God and meditate on His truth, how many chinks are there in our hearts by which other thoughts dart in, drawing our minds off from God to God knows what.

4. In that when we do think of good things it's at the wrong time. Thinking of the sermon when we should be praying. Thinking of something we read when we should be listening to the sermon. Thinking of the sermon when we're trying to read the Bible. In all these ways and many our mind is more ready to think about anything, even good things, than what God at present calls it to. Rather than our thoughts keeping rank and walking in file, which would do us much good, they shoot like meteors and dart like lightning, here and then there, with no order or focus. Even good thoughts must wait their cue and not jump up on stage at a whim. In printing, have all the right letters but out of order, what have you printed but useless gibberish. So our good thoughts must keep rank and step if they're to be most helpful. O the vanity of our thoughts!
7. The sinfulness of our thoughts can be seen:
 1. In their darting to and fro after every interest. Our thoughts are like wanton spaniels, who, though indeed they go with and accompany their master, and come to their journey's end with them in the end, yet do run after every bird, and wildly pursue every flock of sheep they see.
 2. In their so quickly fixing on any strong lust or passion, with such a hold and in such a pursuit, that they can hardly be pulled off or even diverted from it.
 3. In their curiosity, longing and itching to be fed with and to know and then delight in things that do not at all concern us. Chasing news, stories, gossip, what this person said, what that person wore, who was there, who wasn't, what happened next!?! All the stuff of busybodies who live as if they had no life of their own to live and nothing to do but to mind everyone else's business. This curious itch to please the fancy with other men's secrets and business to the neglect of our own soul's business is clear evidence of the sinfulness of our thoughts.
 4. In their taking thought how to fulfill and make provision for the lusts of the flesh, Rom 13.14.
 5. In their acting out those sinful pleasures by imagination which they cannot at present fulfill. O the sinfulness of our sinful thoughts!

9 Directives

1. Be humbled for your evil thoughts, Pr 30.32. *They* are the parents of all your sins, the bellows of all your inordinate affections, the panderers to all your lusts, taking daily thought to make provision for your flesh, Rom 13.14. **Yet**, for all your sinful thoughts, and for all the sins to which they've led, take heart, for God's thoughts of mercy towards you are more than your thoughts of rebellion towards Him. You only began to think evil thoughts since you were born, but His thoughts of mercy for you have been from everlasting, Ps 103.17. Therefore be humbled for your evil thoughts and seek your refuge in His thoughts of mercy, Jer 3.12; Hos 14.4-7
2. Pray against your evil thoughts, asking God to rid you of them. Your heart is in His hands, and to Him alone belongs the real work of heart-work. He alone can search, clean, make-new, and keep the heart.
 - A. So cry out to God when the devil violates your mind with evil and God will hear the cry of the oppressed and come to your aid.
 - B. Tell Him that you can't stand before your thoughts and beg Him to vindicate His own name by His own power, because not only is the heart of the king in His hands (Pr 21.1), but He's the Ruler and King of all hearts and can easily command them and keep them in order.

3. Hide the Word in your heart to keep you from sinning there, Ps 119.11, 59; Mt 12.35
 - A. This is to apply the salve to the sore. The heart is the seat and center of sin. When we apply the Word there we work to root out the Canaanites of the land who grieve us. When we hide the Word in our hearts we set up an ambush to cut off sin the minute it appears, 2Cor 10.4-5
- D. Preserve and keep up lively, holy, and spiritual affections in your heart. Don't let them cool! Keep the fire of the heart burning by frequent meditations and prayers, Ps 39.3. The thoughts are the bellows that kindle and enflame the affections; and if they are enflamed, they cause the thoughts to boil. So think on these things! and the peace and joy of God will fill (and guard!) your heart.
- E. Get your heart duly impressed with deep and strong apprehensions of God's holiness, majesty, omnipresence, and omniscience. The reason Job made a covenant with his eyes (and heart) in 31.1-4 is because he had a strong sense of God's seeing and counting all his steps. Think much and deeply upon God and the thoughts will be much better kept in line.
6. Begin the day with thoughts of God and good things, Ps 57.7-10; 103.1-5; Phil 4.8
 - A. If vanity gets possession of our heart in the morning, it'll strive to keep it all day long. If you awake with God, you'll be more likely to walk in the fear of God all the day long, Ps 1.1-3
7. If evil thoughts still haunt you, beat them off like flies
 - A. When a person's email or phone number gets out, there seems to be no end of the spam and junk he gets. In the same way, the reason why we have so many peddlers of sin coming to *our* hearts is because we're known to buy and take such trifles; and the reason why so many of them knock at *our* door is because we're known to give their kind lodging. –If we rebuked them and shut the door in their faces, they would come less and less of them would come.
8. Turn away your eyes from beholding vanity
 - A. Vain objects and vain speeches engender vain imaginations and give way to sinful practices.
 - B. We need to keep a strict watch on our eyes and ears if we ever hope to preserve our hearts and thoughts. It's foolish to tempt the tempter to tempt us and to make our hearts worse by opportunity than they already are by nature.
9. Beware of idleness
 - A. Idleness is an hour of temptation. Idle people have no business but to sin, and they who follow their calling diligently have no leisure to sin. The best way to rid our minds of evil thoughts is by good employment.
 - B. Our thoughts are so active that if we don't employ them well, they'll employ themselves poorly. It's in God's mercy that He's appointed us to take up our thoughts with our callings. Our callings are meant to entertain our thoughts and provide work for them to do in the interim between the duties of His worship.
10. Commit your ways to God and He will establish your plans/thoughts, Pr 16.3
11. Love God and His Law
 - A. Your soul will be where it loves, and where your heart is, there will your thoughts be. So set your affections on things above and when once your love is settled, your thoughts will center and dwell there, Col 3.1-3. And this love will make you watchful and fearful, lest you should offend the Lover of your soul.