

Sinful Thoughts: what are they 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 talks about them and with them, deliberating, consulting, and reasoning. It holds the objects in view for its affections and discourses with itself about them as well as with them. These are a man's "thoughts".
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

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
 - 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
4. 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
5. 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.
6. 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.
7. 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.
- 8. Commit your ways to God and He will establish your plans/thoughts, Pr 16.3
- 9. 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.