

Controlling Our Thoughts and Submitting Them to God

Objective

To understand the importance of our thoughts and consider ways to control them and submit them to God

References

✠ Diabolic Wars by HH Pope Shenouda III

Scripture Verse

“And do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” (**Romans 12:2**)

Lesson Guidelines

1. Why our Thoughts are important

- The first part of the body to be anointed in Chrismation is the mind because if we THINK rightly, all else will follow.
- Why does Madison Avenue spend billions of dollars every year in advertising? To change our mind, or convince our minds to ACT in a certain way.
- What we “buy” or accept is of the utmost importance—advertisers know that but more importantly and with much dire consequences, the Enemy knows that.
- There is a principle that the way we think is the way we feel—feeling down, because of negative thoughts; feeling hopeless, because of hopeless thoughts; feeling up because of positive thoughts (but these thoughts must be based in the truth).
- Consider 2 people in the same situation yet they each have a distinctly different take on it. Why? They **think** differently about the situation.
- The Enemy (Satan) wants to fill our hearts with thoughts that could overwhelm our life with doubts, fear and suspicions, which could lead us far away from God.
- Sometimes we are not even aware that a thought could be from the Devil so we abdicate our power to accept or reject it.
- The sin is not in the temptation- even Christ was tempted “For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all *points* tempted as *we are*, yet without sin.” (**Hebrews 4:15**)
- The sin is in the buying and the building on the ideas offered to us- it is a betrayal to God “Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman: Has God indeed said, ‘You shall not eat of every tree of the garden’?” And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which *is* in the midst of the garden, God has said, ‘You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.’”
Then the serpent said to the woman: You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil. So when the woman saw that the tree *was* good for food, that it *was* pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make *one* wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate.” (**Genesis 3:1-6**)

- One of the Fathers said “We cannot keep the birds from flying over our heads but we can keep them from nesting in our hair”

2. Some ways the Enemy tries to affect our thoughts

- Sin and wrong teaching in the guise of virtue “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves” (**Matthew 7:15**)
- Remembrance of evil entailing death - (remembering lusts or past sins brings resentment/unforgiveness and can be a distraction to the point that we can’t pray. This indicates that we no longer have control of our thoughts.
- Thoughts coming from senses- we need to be very cautious and conscious about what we see and hear. Examples: movies, porn, way we dress, etc.
- Thoughts that come from other people –sometimes we view ourselves based on what others have said, “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.” (**1 John 4:1**)
- REMEMBER, all sinful actions begin as thoughts.
- Know what you think and become aware of your thoughts.
- The Devil is no respecter of a person’s age so we need to be on the lookout for these influences with our children as well, and rebut with the Truth.

3. How do we battle in this war of thoughts?

- First realize that much training along with Grace is necessary
- Pray for and develop discernment which is one of the greatest virtues “Casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.” (**2 Corinthians 10:5**)
- We must examine and determine whether a thought is from God or not.
- Bring the thought to God-this necessitates familiarity with and knowledge of God’s word.
- Spend time in the Word of God every day to increase in knowledge.
- Be firm with any thought/idea that is against God.
- In the Fraction of the Liturgy, we pray, “Every thought that is not pleasing to Your goodness, take away from us.”
- Think positive thoughts, “Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things *are* noble, whatever things *are* just, whatever things *are* pure, whatever things *are* lovely, whatever things *are* of good report, if *there is* any virtue and if *there is* anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.” (**Philippians 4:8**)
- We need to train ourselves not to meditate on the negative but to focus on the positive
- If something truly negative is affecting me then put it before the Lord, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” (**Philippians 4:6-7**)
- Seek spiritual guidance.
- If we are unable to discern something on our own, we need to ask our Father of Confession or our Spiritual Father for help.

Conclusion

What we think is of the utmost importance for it determines who we are and what we do. The choices before us are rather clear, do we believe God or the Enemy? We must first recognize what it is that we think, then using God's word; discern whether thoughts are in line with our Lord. If they are not, we are to cast them down and replace them with the Truth. All this necessitates much prayer and training. The end result, though, is freedom in our thoughts and a clear path in God's way.

Activities/Discussion Points

1. What are some examples in our culture where the Enemy tries to disguise sin as a virtue? (tolerance/ political correctness; enlightened/sophisticated homosexual lifestyle)
2. How can my remembering of the past benefit the Enemy by leading me away from God?
3. Do I compare myself to others? What do I do with that information?
4. Do I buy things easily? Do I need to have what others have?
5. Is there anything that was said in your past that you accepted as truth which may actually have come from the Enemy? ("You are not smart, you are ugly, you are useless, etc.)
6. Is it possible to accept bad things said about your family and meditate on those things?