

STUDY GUIDE: LIVING THE APPLIED LIFE (MODULE 202)

Lesson #4 – Applied to Our Minds: What's On Your Mind?

The real spiritual battle is in the mind. The fact is by the time our sin manifests itself in actions, it is already too late - the battle is already over.

Have you ever been asked the question, “What’s on your mind?” Usually, the questioner wants to know what you are thinking about at that very moment. However, from a spiritual perspective, this may be a question we should be routinely asking ourselves. The truth is that what is on our mind is a very accurate indicator of who we really are.

Solomon says it this way in Proverbs 23:7, “*For as (a man) thinks within himself, so he is.*” In other words, you are what you think about. Paul is much more direct in Romans 8:5-6 when he declares, “*For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace...*” And because of this he adds a strong exhortation in Colossians 3:2, “*Set your mind on things above and not things on earth.*”

With all this said, we see that the real spiritual battle is in the mind. The fact is by the time our sin manifests itself in actions, it is already too late - the battle is already over. We have lost before we actually even committed the sin. Jesus shared this profound spiritual reality in Matthew 5 when He tells us that sin does not begin with the act of murder, but rather with the mere thoughts of anger. He also adds that sin does not begin when one commits the act of adultery, but rather when one lusts over the woman in his mind.

There is an old gospel song entitled, *Old Man's Rubble* which poetically expressed where the spiritual conflict really rages. It says, “*Deep within you there's a spiritual battle. There's a voice of the darkness and a voice of the light. And just by listening, you've made your decision. 'Cause the voice you hear is going to win the fight.*”

So, with the sobering reality that the front line of the battle is in our mind, not our behavior, we must carefully assess how we are managing what we think about. We must recognize that what is on our mind is the most accurate indicator of our real, spiritual health. So, let's evaluate what kind of mind we might have.

A Carnal Mind

Paul describes the unconverted, carnal mind in Philippians 3:18-19, “*For many walk ...that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things.*”

One of the primary characteristics of the unbeliever is that his mind is set on earthly things. This word “set” carries with it the idea of being “intent on or fixed.” Their singular focus is on earthly things.

Any unregenerate mind left to its own unrestrained devices will focus on the here and now – what is immediately present. And sadly our world is filled with masses of carnal minds that are set on earthly things and are constantly enticing us to join them in their fixation on earthly things.

A Conflicted Mind

It is with this conflicted mind that we may see shadows of ourselves. Sadly, many churches, as Alistair Begg expresses, are filled with what he calls “unconverted believers.” They profess Christ, but are not changed. They have the talk of a believer, but their mind and actions are that of an unbeliever. This is not a new phenomenon.

Do you remember when Jesus was informing His disciples of His pending death and Peter (in his typical impetuous fashion) objected to such a possibility? In Mark 8:33 Jesus makes a striking statement to him. Jesus orders, “*Get behind Me, Satan; for you are not setting your mind on God’s interests, but man’s.*” Peter, devoted as he was to Jesus, still struggled with a conflicted mind. His mind was flip-flopping between earthly things and heavenly things. And Jesus called him out when it had “flopped” on earthly things.

James describes an unconverted believer in 1:8 as, “*being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.*” The conflicted mind waivers back and forth from a carnal mind to a converted mind, making him “*unstable in all his ways.*” On Sunday morning his mind is on spiritual things and by Sunday afternoon it is back on earthly things. He reads the Word and his mind is on spiritual things. He then reads the newspaper and it is back on earthly things. Back and forth. Up and down. In and out.

I fear that for far too many of us, this may be descriptive of our common state of mind – continually waffling between heavenly thoughts and earthly thoughts – “*a double minded man, unstable in all his ways.*” Hence, Paul’s exhortation to “*set your mind on things above and not on earthly things.*”

You might ask how can we possibly live in a material world and not find ourselves thinking about earthly things? It is not whether you are thinking about earthly things or not, it is rather *how* you are thinking about these earthly things that is so important. Do you think about earthly things within the context of heaven and eternity or simply within the context of yourself, your own pleasure and merely the here and now? We need to be continually in a heavenly state of mind even while we are in the midst of earthly things.

A Converted Mind

Our goal must be to allow the Holy Spirit to take such total control of our mind that regardless of what we are in the midst of, He is controlling our thoughts. Paul expresses this objective in II Corinthians 10:5 when he says, “*We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.*” Every single thought captive.

Paul lists for us what we should be filling our minds with on a daily basis in Philippians 4:8, “*Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell (take an inventory) on these things.*”

A young granddaughter sitting on her grandfather’s lap asked curiously, “Grandpa, do you think I could live my entire life and not have a bad thought?”

Her grandfather replied, “No, honey, I don’t think anybody could do that.”

She then asked, “How about a year? Could I go for a year and not have a bad thought?”

Her grandfather again shook his head, “No, honey, not even for a year.”

Persistently, she inquired, “How about a day? Could I go for a day?”

Again her grandfather answered sadly, “No, honey, I don’t even think you could go for a day without a bad thought.”

Not giving up, the little girl pressed, “How about a minute? Could I go for one minute without a bad thought?”

Her grandfather smiled and nodded approvingly, “Yes, sweetheart, you could go for one minute without having a bad thought.”

“Then, grandpa,” she answered, “that is how I want to live my life – one minute at a time.” Maybe that is how all of us should start living our lives – one minute at a time.

I love Isaiah 26:3, “*You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you*” (ESV). The word “*stayed*” means something that is fixed in place or immovable. We want to have our minds immovably fixed on Him – regardless of our immediate earthly environment or our current life circumstances.

How can we successfully maintain a completely converted mind? The words of the great old hymn by Helen Lemmel remind us, “Turn your eyes upon Jesus. Look full in His wonderful face. And the things of earth will grow strangely dim. In the light of His glory and grace.”

Hebrews 12:2 says, “*fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith.*” May we always keep our eyes looking only in His direction!

STUDY GUIDE QUESTIONS

1. Why is “what” is on our mind such a good indicator of our spiritual health?
2. How do you react to this statement? “We see that the real spiritual battle is in the mind. The fact is by the time our sin manifests itself in actions, it is already too late – the battle is already over.”
3. What are some of the ways I might see in my own life a “Conflicted Mind?”
4. Describe your greatest struggle in terms of a conflicted mind? (Romans 8:5-6)
5. What is Paul’s prescription for a conflicted mind? (Philippians 4:8)
6. Most of us are familiar with Isaiah 26:3: “You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you.” How can you practically apply this verse to your life?
7. What things would be best for you to avoid, in order to avoid flip-flopping back and forth from a conflicted mind to a “converted mind?”
8. What do you think is the key in your life to “keeping your eyes on Jesus?”
9. If our mind is the battleground, how can we proactively and successfully wage war and win the war?
10. What is going to change in your life going forward because of this lesson? What are you going to start doing differently?