

G I G O

Romans 8:5-8

As we begin our work together in 2020 as God's people here at West Side, I want us to look into the minds of people in general. I have always enjoyed reading anything C. S Lewis wrote. In his book, "The Great Divorce" Lewis says, **"There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, 'Thy will be done,' and those to whom God says in the end, 'Thy will be done.' All that are in Hell, choose it. Without that self-choice there could be no Hell. No soul that seriously and constantly desires joy will ever miss it. Those who seek find. Those who knock it is opened."**

Here is a great truth - People either freely do the will of God in response to His commands and inherit eternal life, or they do their own will and go to hell. **There is no other choice.**

Romans 8:5-8 contrasts these two classes of people: those who are self-centered against those who are God-centered; flesh-directed people against Holy Spirit-directed people; unbelievers versus believers; pagans versus Christians. **No one is neutral.** We either love God or hate him. There is radical difference between the two classes of people.

In this passage, Paul contrasts the mind of an unbeliever with the mind of a Christian. As we study together this morning, we should examine ourselves and make sure which mindset we are. We are hopefully in the class of God's holy people, those who have experienced a supernatural change in their lives. A bad tree must become a good tree to bear good fruit. Wolves must become sheep. Only God can change our natures.

I want to look at some aspects of the mind of the unbeliever. When Paul uses the words "*mind*" or "*think*," he is not just talking about intellectual activity. Rather, he is speaking about the whole attitude of the heart. Such thinking involves not just the intellect but also the will and affections. We are up against the Devil himself as we go out and try to seek and save the lost. We need to understand how most people think.

THE NATURE OF AN UNBELIEVER

The nature of unbelievers is described here as kata sarka— *“according to the flesh”* (v. 5). These follow the motivations of the flesh and surrender to its control. What is flesh here? It is human nature, under sin’s total control, untouched by the Holy Spirit. Unbelievers are slaves of sin. They live in sin. They are bad trees. They are dead toward God.

Unbelievers are in the flesh; therefore, they are against God; against their parents, against church leaders, and against the Bible. Rom. 5:6-10 says they are helpless, sinners, ungodly, and enemies of God.

THEY THINK THE THINGS OF THE FLESH

Second, unbelievers think the things of the flesh. The Greek word phronousin (φρονοῦσιν) indicates that they do so continually (v. 5). Our mindset reveals our basic nature. Ask yourself, “What am I continually focused on, devoted to, striving for, and thinking about”?

When Paul says unbelievers continually think the things of the flesh, he is not speaking of merely their intellectual activity. Thinking here encompasses all one’s faculties - mind, will, and affections. Unbelievers are engrossed with sin. They may come to church, but as they meet with people, their minds are not thinking about spiritual things but carnal.

Unbelievers pursue the things of this world. They are taken up with buying and selling, planting and harvesting, building, marrying and giving in marriage. They are like the people of Noah’s days, who had no time to listen to God’s warning about the coming destruction. They are like the people of Sodom. They hate God and are unconcerned about their salvation. Their thinking is characterized by godlessness. They say, “Let us eat, drink, and enjoy life, for tomorrow we die.” They are narcissistic, atheistic, hedonistic, and Satan-directed people.

They are what they think. *“For as he thinks in his heart; so is he”* Prov. 23:7. Our thinking defines who we are. *“Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks”* Matt. 12:34. The unbeliever does not think of truth, God, eternal life, righteousness, love, everlasting joy, or judgment.

Like Lot's wife, the unbeliever gives himself to worldliness. The apostle John describes the unbelieving man of the world: ***“Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its lusts pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever”*** (1 John 2:15-17).

Thinking the things of the flesh also means taking the side of Satan, not the side of righteousness. The unbeliever stands against God and is on the side of sin and Satan. He is single-minded in his devotion to sin and the service of Satan. He wholeheartedly seeks first the kingdom of Satan, sinning against God for his own illicit pleasure.

Such people are idolaters who worship and serve creation and hate the Creator. They are materialistic and do not understand spiritual things. They can be philosophers, politicians, preachers, scientists, and followers of various religions. They can be rich or poor, simple or sophisticated – but they are worldly. They're enemies of the cross. ***“whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame—who set their mind on earthly things”***. Phil. 3:19.

Their minds are focused only on the things of the flesh. With their minds, they exchange the truth for a lie (Rom. 1:28-32; 3:9-18). Their minds are fixed on earthly things, on the works of the flesh. Paul lists these works: ***“Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips . . . The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God”*** (Col. 3:5-8; Gal. 5:19-21).

They are like the fool of Luke 12 whose field brought such abundant crops. He boasted, “I will build a bigger barn and store everything in it. I will live for a long time.” His mind was focused only on the things of this earth—a bigger house, a bigger barn, a bigger everything. They are like the rich man of Luke 16, who lived all his life dressed in purple. Never in his life did he think about God or heaven. When he wound up in hell, he finally thought about heaven. But it was too late.

What am I thinking? What am I devoted to? What is filling my heart? What am I planning? What do I spend my time, money, and energies on? We are what we think. Based on our thinking, we go to heaven or hell.

THE MIND OF THE FLESH IS DEATH

Here is something that each of us Christians know – but those in the world ignore. We must understand that most people on earth give NO thought to this point. *For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.* (v. 6). The flesh permeates his mentality, outlook, and philosophy.

This is where we need an adjustment in our thinking. We need to understand the totality of their separation from God as Paul saw it here. An unbeliever is death walking, death driving, death laughing, death eating, death working, death celebrating. It is a scary and sorry sight. If our parents, siblings, children, and friends are not Christians, they are death. The wages of sin is death. If you are a believer, and your spouse is an unbeliever, you are living with death. The dead person cannot make himself alive. He does not want to. He loves death, hell, and this world.

Look at the heart of the dead man: *“For from within, out of men’s hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly”* Mark 7:21-22. Jeremiah states, *“The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked; who can know it?”* Jer. 17:9. Moses writes, *“The LORD saw how great man’s wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time”* (Gen. 6:5).

The non-Christian is under sin, death, Satan, and condemnation. He is looking forward to death eternal. Oh, he may dress nicely and do many things to impress people. But he is a dead man walking. No Bible-believer will be impressed by Death walking in a \$5000 suit. It is just a burial shroud enveloping the dead.

When we speak to such a person about his soul, eternal life, Jesus, the Bible, he does not understand anything because he is dead. Many are under the delusion that they serve God as they are, and that God must accept their sacrifice. They have believed Satan's great lie – if we are sincere – God accepts what we offer. Jesus never said come me in any way you choose. He did say come to me...take MY YOKE upon you. We are not free to pick our yoke – we must accept His.

Paul tells us: *“As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath”* (Eph. 2:1-3).

The unbeliever lives in death, having only eternal death to look forward to. His entire life direction is death. Everything he does is against God. A fool, he says every day in his heart, “There is no God,” and goes about sinning.

Brothers and sisters, I want to encourage each of us to go and find one who we see is in this condition. Befriend them and over time help them see their pitiful eternal state. Someone did that for me – for you – should we not do it for others??

120 in 2020 will become reality and more if each of us just finds one. What rejoicing there will be in heaven if we do. May God bless each of us in this undertaking.

PART 2

Continuing in our text from this morning, Paul goes on to show us four more things about this worldly mindset.

THE MIND OF THE FLESH IS ENMITY AGAINST GOD

“For the mind of the flesh is enmity against God” (v. 7). An unbeliever is not neutral to God. An unbeliever is an enemy of God. That kind, very moral person is without God and without hope. When you speak to him about his true condition and declare that he must trust in Christ and his atonement, suddenly, such a nice, moral person begins to fume and reveal their true nature. He is an enemy of God and of the saints of God. They are against God and against those who preach the Bible. They are like those who stoned the prophets, killed the apostles, and crucified Christ. Religious people who are not true believers are the most dangerous people in the world.

Nominalists vehemently oppose those who preach the Bible way of life. They are like Ahab, who hated the prophet Micaiah because he never said anything good about him. They are like Jezebel, who hated Elijah. The unbeliever’s mind is hostile to God, the Bible, and God’s church. Stephen, the first martyr, was stoned to death because he spoke about the true God and his Son, Jesus Christ.

Paul says, ***“Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior”*** (Col. 1:21). Enmity against God reveals their total depravity. But God is against them. The wrath of God is revealed against them. The essence of sin is enmity against God. When we sin, we show our enmity to God by violating His will.

AN UNBELIEVER DOES NOT SUBMIT TO GOD’S LAW

The word *hupotassô* (submit) has to do with a soldier submitting to the orders of his commanding officer. The soldier is under the superior officer. A subordinate always salutes the person over him in the army. The sinner refuses to obey his Creator.

When God says, “Thou shalt not,” the sinner says, “I shall do what I want, when I want, how I want, and who are you to tell me how I should live?” He is under sin’s control and enlisted in Satan’s army. He refuses to take orders from God.

HE IS NOT ABLE TO SUBMIT TO GOD’S LAW

The unbeliever does not submit to God’s law because he is not able (oudunatai) to do so (v. 7). Total depravity produces total moral inability. They go hand in hand. As an enemy of God, the sinner does not obey God. He is unable to do so because he is dead. All unbelievers, whether one’s spouse or parents or children or friends, are wholly in the grip of sin, death, and Satan. They are slaves who can only sin.

HE CANNOT PLEASE GOD

An unbeliever cannot please God (v. 8). The purpose of human life is to please God. How do we please God? **By knowing and doing God’s will, which we discover by reading the Bible, the word of God.** The sinful man, the dead man, the enemy of God, the disobedient man, the morally incompetent man, cannot please God. He can only make God angry every day unless he has been set free by the Holy Spirit from the law of sin and death. The sinner remains at enmity with God, disobedient and morally powerless to please God. The sinner can only please himself by pleasing Satan, whose orders he perfectly obeys.

CONCLUSION

We are what we think. No one can say he does not think. We are always thinking. Either we will think God’s thoughts or the thoughts of Satan. Either we are dead or alive. Either we obey God or sin. Either we are depraved and morally incompetent, or we are godly and morally able to obey God and please him. Our hearts are deceitful and wicked, and by nature dead toward God. But thank God, he raises the dead because of his great love and rich mercy for wicked sinners like us. May we therefore pray for a new outpouring of the Spirit, that he would raise the spiritually dead to think God’s thoughts and delightfully do his holy will. The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.

Most of us think of those we work with, play golf with, maybe even have meals with as good people. But the truth of the matter is they are good only from the point of view that they seem better behaved than others. We are comparing them against ourselves.

Paul warned of this in 2 Cor. 10:12, ***“For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.”***

Most of our friends, family members and just those we know do not judge their life by God’s word, they do exactly what Paul warned against. “I’m not as bad as....” is their thinking when we discuss eternal life with them. Be aware that this is the way most think.

As we begin to look around for those who need Jesus in their life, we need to be forewarned that there will be resistance; ignorance; apathy; and anger. But our Lord faced all this and more. Let us be determined to save just one this year. May God bless each of us in this effort.